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100% INDEPENDENT PLAYSTATION 2 MAGAZINE

PSM

FEBRUARY 2006, ISSUE 107

The **FULL STORY**
on the MOST
SHOCKING
**SPLINTER
CELL
EVER!**



PSM PICKS THE
**BEST GAMES
OF THE YEAR**

SCORCHING
NEW **PS3**
INFO!

1ST HANDS-ON!

SPLINTER CELL: DOUBLE AGENT

PLUS: FIRST LOOK at SPLINTER CELL on the PSP!





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E-M
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PlayStation 2

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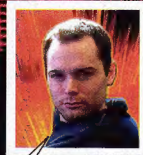
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10 GAMES

That's what it all comes down to. The best of the best of the past year. This issue, we pass final judgment on the biggest games of 2005. Which ones made it in... and which one earned the #1 spot? The countdown begins on page 30.

We're also taking you inside one of the most shocking sequels ever, *Splinter Cell: Double Agent*. Seriously — the setup for this one is worthy of a triple-take. Meet the new Sam Fisher on page 44.

Chris Slate
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF
<http://chrisstate.blogspot.com>



CHRIS SLATE
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

FAVORITE GAMES
Platformers, action-adventure, arcade racing

SUCKER FOR Goofy games, NES-era nostalgia, cool character designs

OTHER INTERESTS
Comics, anime, action flicks, hoops, drawing, fast food, *Blanch*



RANDY NELSON
EXECUTIVE EDITOR

FAVORITE GAMES
Platformers, first-person shooters, arcade racers

SUCKER FOR Online multiplayer, *Guitar Hero*, and anything by Hideo Kojima.

OTHER INTERESTS
The Nightmare Before Christmas, my cats, Karl!



KAISER HWANG
SENIOR EDITOR

FAVORITE GAMES
Geometry Wars, *Worms*

SUCKER FOR Buying records even though I already own the CD

OTHER INTERESTS
Playing Dreamcast, Xbox Live, taking bad photos, Tara on the 3rd floor



JUSTIN CHENG
ASSOCIATE EDITOR

FAVORITE GAMES
Fighters and arcade racers

SUCKER FOR 2D fighters, videogame-related toys, all things *Gundam*

OTHER INTERESTS
Sgt. Frog, *Blanch*, Runaways, my cat, *Battlestar Galactica*, Family Guy



BILL DONOHUE
MANAGING EDITOR

"Unlike that famous old joke, February is indeed cold, but it's really short. Sometimes I kill myself."



CHRIS INLAY
ART DIRECTOR

"I prefer cold to heat. I wish the next ice age would arrive soon. Sweaty people are gross."

"When Kaiser ran this month's previews lineup past me, it made me a lot happier than I usually am with the state of gaming in the springtime. Why? Because it looks like publishers are finally getting it. What's it? The fact that their games stand a chance of selling more if they avoid the holiday crunch and launch in the spring of the next year. More importantly, it means gamers won't see the usual spring slump."

"The February issue has always been one of my favorites at PSM. Why? Because it's when we get to go back and play all the best games of the past year and engage in some lively debate over which ones will make it into our coveted PSM 10... not to mention which order they'll appear in. This year was one of the closest first-place finishes ever, I think, which made it extra exciting for everyone."

"I know I talk about the PSP a lot, but it's not personal. It's just that developers think porting games is a good idea (though from a money standpoint, I guess it is). It's just that Sony wants the PSP to be the media hub you take with you instead of being the ultimate portable gaming console. It's just that, at times, it feels too ambitious for its own good, with good but not great solutions. C'mon, show me the money!"

"We've just moved into our new offices, so that's pretty exciting. Everything's all new and shiny — it feels very different than our old place. Now I've got to find a some space to put all of my toys. Maybe I have too many toys? Nah. It's well, they were pretty cold in the office lately (well, as cold as it gets around these parts), but now that they've got the heaters working, I think it might be a little too hot. Oh well."

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OUR MISSION

PSM IS devoted to giving our readers what they deserve: the absolute best coverage anywhere of everything that matters to PlayStation gamers, because we love it just as much as you do.

WE WILL give the games that matter to you, the hardcore gamer, the in-depth coverage they demand. We will only review games when they're ready, after we've beaten them; we'll pull no punches with our verdicts and stand behind them 100%. We will dig deeper behind the big stories, and never settle for "just okay" with anything we do. When we make a

promise, we'll keep it. When we make a mistake, we'll admit it. We will surprise you and always strive to give you more.

WE WON'T waste your time with movie or music reviews. We won't waste space interviewing celebrities who know jack about games, in some lame attempt to look cool. You know what? Games are cool. We don't care about being kid-tinged and mother-approved, and we'll never hesitate to call B.S. when necessary.

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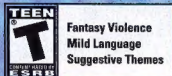
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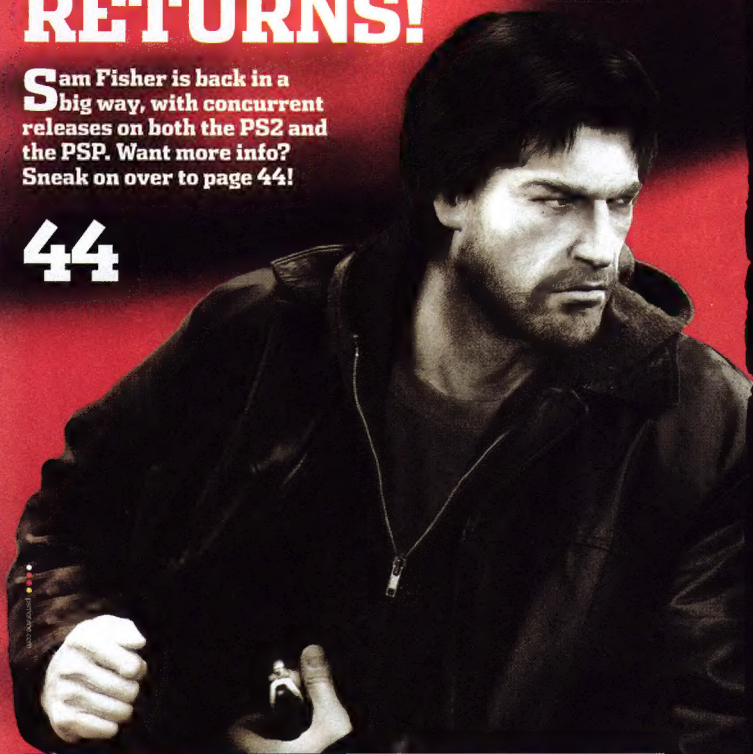
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SPLINTER CELL RETURNS!

Sam Fisher is back in a big way, with concurrent releases on both the PS2 and the PSP. Want more info? Sneak on over to page 44!

44



2005'S BEST GAMES

THE
PSM
IT ALL COMES DOWN TO THIS: WHICH GAME WILL CLAIM OUR HOT SPOT?
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PSM's Top 10 Games of 2005!

30

Once again, it's time for us to pick the best games of the past year, so let's get out the bats, knives and guns and start talkin' games! The "choosing" starts on page 30!

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PULSE

WHAT'S HOT IN THE WORLD OF PS2, PSP, AND PS3

PS3 BUZZ

TRUTH OR

PLAYSTATION 3

Before it was even revealed to the public, the PlayStation 3 has been a hot topic of discussion between friends, message board regulars, and game shop clerks. Like the old "pass it down" gag, a lot of the facts about the system have gotten muddied in the past few months, and more "fictitious facts" have been spread by word of mouth and retail workers. It's enough to make anyone ask what's really real about PS3, and it's about time that PSM, thanks to our industry sources both on the record and off, clears the air. That said, we've assembled the most frequently flaunted "facts" about PS3 and put them past the very people making the system and the games it will play.

Claim #1: Your HDTV isn't good enough for PS3

Totally, utterly false. At this year's E3 expo, Sony made a big deal out of the fact that, one-upping Microsoft's Xbox 360, the PS3 would be capable of displaying games at 1080p (1920x1280 progressive scan) resolution. While that's a nice feature to have on paper, the simple truth is that 99.99% of PS3 games in development are set to run at 720p (1280x720) resolution. It's like Epic Games' programming guru Tim Sweeney recently asked us when we visited his office to see *Unreal Tournament 2007* running in 720p on PS3: would you rather have more pixels (a higher resolution) or better looking ones? It's an attitude shared by almost every PS3 developer. Make PS3 games fast

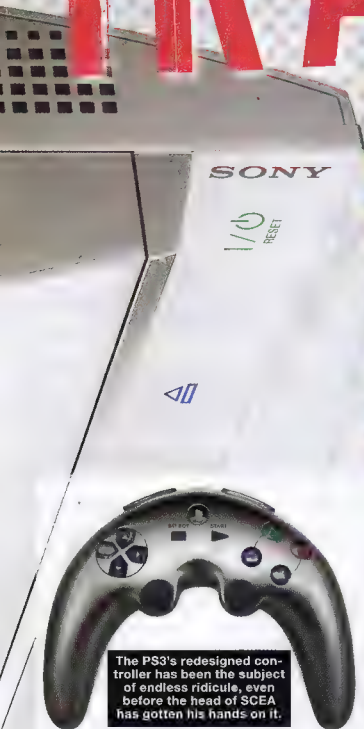
and beautiful, not slower and sharper. So, don't mortgage your future on a ridiculously expensive 1080p capable HDTV; the cost to benefit ration just won't warrant it.

Claim #2: The PS3 controller is going to feel horrible

This remains to be seen... er, felt. However, from what PSM has learned by speaking with developers and having our faces inches away from the pad at E3, it almost certainly won't be the case. The DualShock 3 (or whatever it's eventually called) is a lot smaller than photos would have you believe (the camera adds 10 pounds, right?) and has some smart ergonomics behind it. In reality, the controller is about the size of the current PS2 pad, but its rounded form

TRASH?

Wondering how much you hear and read about PlayStation 3 is junk? PSM sorts the facts from a whole lot of fiction



The PS3's redesigned controller has been the subject of endless ridicule, even before the head of SCEA has gotten his hands on it.

allows for you to grip it without needing to bend your fingers or thumbs as much to utilize the shoulder buttons and face buttons. Sony's goal is said to be a controller that feels better no matter how big or small your hands are. It should be considered, also, that the seemingly prong-like handles are actually contoured on the back side of the pad for a no-slip grip.

Claim #3: The PS3 isn't going to come with a hard disk drive

This is true. That doesn't mean it won't support mass storage, however. Sony is taking a cue from its experience in other consumer electronics with PS3 and planning to let the consumer decide how much



Microdrives will bring truly mass storage to PS3, but only if you decide you need it.

and what form of storage they need. After all, why drive up the cost of the system (more on that in a sec) by including a hard disk when not everyone will make use of it? Sony intends to let the casual player save their games on low-cost flash memory, but if you find yourself downloading lots of movies and music, various capacities of microdrives will be accommodated by the PS3's disk drive bay. Start small and cheap and run out of space, then upgrade to something larger. That's the idea.

Claim #4: PS3 will be a Wi-Fi access point

There's been a lot of misunderstanding about PS3's wireless networking capabilities. Depending on who you listen to, it will do everything from serve as a router for all of your wireless devices to turning on your yard lights via the Web. So, here's the deal. PS3 will have Wi-Fi capabilities out of the box, but it's simply cost prohibitive to have the system be a true Wi-Fi router / access point. Instead, the system will be able to connect wirelessly to an existing Wi-Fi network in your home (or a wired one via its Gigabit Ethernet port). It will also be possible for the PS3 and PSP to connect to one another via ad hoc (device to device) mode, much like local wireless PSP play is handled now. Just don't think

you're going to get Blu-Ray Disc, incredible graphics, and \$100+ of Wi-Fi routing hardware in a system that costs...

Claim #5: \$600 to \$700?!

No. Sony isn't stupid. It is, however, keeping its lips sealed on the actual price point for now. When we recently spoke with SCEA president and co-CEO Kaz Hirai, he essentially said that you will feel that the PS3's capabilities are worth the price they're going to be asking. He also pointed to their history of providing a lot of bang for the buck, in particular the PSP value pack. That said, our developer contacts are all expecting the system to debut for, at most, \$399. Yes, Blu-Ray Disc is new and expensive, but Sony will be willing to swallow the cost for long-term success. PS3 could potentially be facing a sub-\$300 Xbox 360 when it launches in the fall, so a price point double that would be retail suicide. Last we asked, Sony has every intention of staying alive and well in the console race.

Have you heard an outrageous claim about what the PS3 will or won't do from a friend or store clerk? We'd like to hear about it. Email us at letters@psmsonline.com, and if it's something that's getting out of hand, we'll set the record straight again.

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TRASH CAN

ARM

BARRACKS

GROUND

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GATE

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CRATE

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BANK

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TREE

OutRun 2006 Coast 2 Coast

The News: It was recently announced that *OutRun 2006: Coast 2 Coast* is coming to PS2 and PSP in March. The game will feature 12 licensed Ferraris, and online multiplayer for up to 6 racers. Each version will apparently have exclusive content, but there is connectivity between the two versions.

The View: *OutRun* is one of our favorite racing franchises... ever. It's simply a phenomenal arcade racing series. *OutRun 2* on Xbox was a lot of fun, but we're glad that the PS2 finally gets some *OutRun* love. The fact that we can play it anywhere we want on the PSP only makes the wait for its eventual release that much harder.

The News: After years of releasing high quality — though, unfortunately, oft-delayed — domestic versions of less famous Japanese games, Working Designs has closed its doors for good.

The View: Best known for the releasing the *Lunar* series (and the awesome *Lunar* gift sets) and, more recently, *Growlanser Generations*, Working Designs will be missed. Yes, their games weren't usually released in a timely fashion, but they were almost always worth the wait. R.I.P., Working Designs.



The News: In a not-so-surprising move, Sony has purchased Guerilla Games, makers of the PS2 FPS *Killzone*.

The View: We already knew *Killzone* was coming to PS3, but this move ensures that Guerilla won't be making games for anybody else. That's not really that big of a deal, since their only other game, which happened to be released on both PS2 and Xbox, was the poorly received *ShellShock: Nam '67*.

Phantasy Star Universe just got bigger

PS2 and PC adventurers play nice, for a price

Sega has revealed that the PlayStation 2 and PC versions of its long-awaited online RPG sequel will be fully compatible with one another when the game comes stateside this May. This is especially good news for PS2 owners, since it almost guarantees a much larger base of other gamers to play with, given the huge popularity of online role-playing in the PC world.

In Japan, a month's worth of online play in *Phantasy Star Universe* will work out to about \$10; U.S. pricing has not been announced, but is expected to fall in the \$5-\$8 dollar range.



One character in this shot could be controller by a PS2 player, the other someone on a PC.



Prince of... Russia?

Videogame moves in real life inspire an upcoming PSP game

Everyone who's played a game like *Prince of Persia* or *Shadow of The Colossus* has wished they could pull off the seemingly super-human acrobatic feats of their heroes in the real world. Well, guess what: people are. It's part of a growing street sport called "Parkour" or "Free Running," in which highly athletic, urban youth perform the kind of wall runs, triangle jumps, and daring leaps we can only say "wow!" at in games.

The movement has even inspired a game itself,

fittingly titled *Free Running*. Under development for Eidos by Core Design, the game was first shown two E3 expos ago where its unusual gameplay had people scratching their heads. Well, after watching real "Free Running," such as the amazing feats performed by a Russian youth (shown), our interest level in the game has definitely increased. You can check out this amazing sport for yourself by going to video.google.com and doing a search for "Russian Climbing."



This recent Russian parkour video totally blurs the line between videogame moves and real world acrobatics.



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PlayStation 2

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INBOX

Have a question for the PSM team? Want to sound off about something we wrote? Visit psmonline.com to get in touch with us!

BUY A GAMECUBE!

Dear PSM guys,
Do you guys think that we might see *Metal Gear Solid: Twin Snakes* on the PS2? I mean, *Resident Evil 4* showed up on the PS2, and it was said that it was only for the GameCube. I'm not a big Nintendo fan, and I don't want to get a GameCube just for that game. I loved *Metal Gear Solid* on the PS1, and I want to see it on the PS2.
—Ryan Elder, Ozark, AR

RANDY: I'd say the chances of this happening are about as good as Solid Snake going through an entire game without fighting a Metal Gear. In other words: next to none. However, I'll make sure to ask Kojima-san your question when I conduct my next interview with him, so keep your eyes peeled for his official response. Here's a serious suggestion, though: If you're that big a fan of the original MGS, Ryan, you should really just pick up a GameCube second-hand and a copy of the game — it's really worth breaking the console loyalty barrier for. Don't worry... I won't turn a fellow MGS fan in for being a "platform traitor."



elsewhere. Why? Because they know people who are a little less tech savvy than most (read: the general public) go to their store(s) when they need something game-related. After all, they're the experts, right? Wrong. Without getting too far into the topic, just go to a price comparison site, like www.froogle.com, and search for a 1GB Memory Stick Duo. I just did, and am looking at 10 stores that have them in stock between \$65.00 and \$75.00. Remember, the Internet is your friend!

Dear PSM,

I was in Ireland this summer and I caught a glimpse of a magazine on the newsstand: PSM2, not PSM. PSM2 had gigantic pages and it had reviews of games long before you guys did. The issue I got had a review of *Fahrenheit* or *Indigo Prophecy* as it is called here. They had different writers though. So any ways, what is this PSM2 business?
—Dante D'Orazio, New York, NY

RANDY: Well, Dante (cool name, by the way), it might startle you to know that you weren't in Ireland.

You were on Earth 2... you know, from the DC comics universe. Any ways, Earth 2 has its own version of PSM, and, as you pointed out, it's very different. PSM2's version of me, for example, has grey hair — but only on the sides. Justin has a goatee. Kaiser has no fashion sense. Slate from PSM2 is just evil. He hates basketball and hamburgers. Evil!

Okay... actually, PSM2 is Future's independent PlayStation magazine in the U.K. We don't share content, but we do like their big, glossy pages.

Hey,

I was just sitting around one day after watching *Batman Begins*, thinking about how linear the console games were. Why hasn't anyone thought to make a free roaming world based on the world of *Batman*? —Garrett Pengilly, San Diego, California

CHRIS: Yeah! I've actually thought about how cool it would be to have a non-linear, GTA-style game where you get to hang out in Wayne Manor, slide down the Batpole into the Batcave, then drive the Batmobile into Gotham City. It'd be pretty easy to design; again, just think "Grand Theft Auto," only you get most of your missions from Commissioner Gordon on the roof of the GCPD. Holy Bat-blockbuster, Garrett!

chances of Link, a Nintendo character, being in a PS2-exclusive game were slim to none to begin with, but it would've been awesome if he were there. Unfortunately, even though we're huge *Zelda* fans, we never made Link in the create-a-character mode. Anybody out there have a good Link they want to share?

Guys,

I think you made an error in your 2005 Holiday Buyers Guide. Under PSP Essentials: Accessories, you state that a 1GB SanDisk Memory Stick PRO Duo should cost \$67.99. At every gaming store and website I went to for \$67.99 all you could get is 512MB. 1GB cost around \$100. If there's a specific place where you can get a 1GB memory stick for \$67.99, then please tell me. Most of the people at the gaming stores told me you guys really messed up on that. Thanks! —Jt. Baum, Shrewsbury, MA

KAISER: Hey Jt., despite what anyone else had told you, we didn't get it wrong. See, most of the bigger retail stores (especially the gaming ones) sell their products at prices that are a bit higher than what you can find



Hi guys,

I've only played a demo of *Soul*

Calibur II and I recently learned about Link being in it.

I'm a huge fan of the *Zelda* games, and when I learned of *Soulcalibur III* from you guys, a question popped up that's been bothering me for months. Is Link going to be in *Soulcalibur III*? If not, do you guys know how I can make him in the create-a-character mode? —Nic Carmon, AK

JUSTIN: Well, I assume you've played *Soul Calibur III* by now (and if you haven't, why not?), and you'll notice that Link isn't on the roster. The

Don't believe everything you hear from big retailers: Memory Sticks are a lot less pricey than they'd have you believe.

HIGH DEFINITION HEADACHES

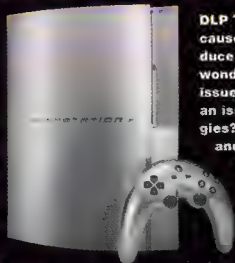
Dear PSM,

I can't wait to get my hands on the PS3, and along with that I plan to upgrade my TV to a big screen HD TV with HDMI ports (\$3500-\$4000). I want the TV I purchase to be capable of 1080p to take full advantage of the glory that will be PS3. However, I have read in various enthusiast forums that there is a concern that the current generation of HDMI ports can only render content connected to them at 30 frames per second. If this is true, the games would look sluggish, would they not? So my questions are: are these rumors about the HDMI ports true? With the answer to that question in mind: should I wait until the PS3 is out to let the technology firm up before making the TV purchase, or is it ok to buy one of the 1080p TVs on the market today? It'll be great to finally have this answered, so I don't have to stare into the dumbfounded faces of the "experts" at every one of the stores that sell these TVs.

—Travis Jones, Southwest Harbor, ME

Hi PSM,

A few questions about TVs and Gaming. I am looking for a new TV and was researching DLP televisions. During my research I learned that



DLP TVs have an issue with game lag caused by the circuitry used to produce high definition pictures. I was wondering if you have heard of this issue and if you knew whether it was an issue with other newer TV technologies? Also, are there any other pros and cons I should consider? What TV technology is recommended for gamers?

—Jimmy Smith, Austin, TX

RANDY: Okay, I'll tackle the 1080p / HDMI query first. Here's some food for thought. While it's cool from a home theater geek standpoint that PS3 will be able to output 1080p video, in practical terms it's not going to mean much for games. Every developer we've spoken to about their PS3 games has said they're aiming for 720p resolution. They just don't think the resolution difference is worth reducing detail in their games. Currently, 1080p is limited to 30fps because there's simply no need for film (24fps) or video (29.97/30fps) content to exceed that. However, PS3 supports the very latest HDMI spec, which can carry a full 1080/60p signal.

Regarding "lag" while playing videogames on DLP televisions, the latest generation of the technology has eliminated this. I've personally played various games on one of Samsung's latest DLP sets and can confirm that there was zero lag.

PSM Guys,

When I first decided to write you guys, it was to disagree with the 6.5 score you gave *The Matrix: Path of Neo*. It was all good at first. Although the graphics were a little clunky, I thought the button-mashing combos were pretty cool. But after playing through to the end, (don't worry, I won't spoil the end for those who haven't reached the end) I realized that this score should probably be LOWER. For those that have beaten the game, pardon the

pun, but how could this "junk" be written? It makes me want to hack into the Matrix and have my digital-self go on a rampage at the Wachowski residence. They should be digitally slapped for what they did. I'm going to send them a swift E-Kick in the A\$\$\$. Thank you PSM, for unplugging me and giving me a choice.

—Andy Mannis, DeVitt, AR

KAISER: See Andy, glad you, um, didn't like the game. I completely agree with you that in the begin-

ning it seemed to have potential. Then... well, we both know what happens. Does the game deserve an even lower score? Y'know, if it wasn't for the license and those few cool *Matrix* moments here and there, I'm sure it would have received a lower score. But as buggy and unfinished as the game was, as a *Matrix* fan, I was still compelled to finish the game — if only out of pure curiosity. And yeah, I agree, the Wachowski brothers need to not make videogames anymore.



Ask a Stupid QUESTION...

THE 800-POUND GORILLA GIVES YOU AN ANSWER!

Hey 800-lb Gorilla,

I hate it when the ink on PSM's pages rubs off onto your hands... especially the cover. I constantly have to wash my hands! Turn the page, wash my hands. Turn the page, wash my hands...

—J.G., Fontana, CA

800-LB GORILLA: Geez, J.G., what kind of rookie, wussie,

PSM reader are you anyway? We thought everybody knew by now that PSM's ink is SUPPOSED to rub off on your hands. How else are you gonna get enough of our special "camouflage ink" when it's time to paint your face? Why, you'll stick out like a sore thumb!

Seriously though, J.G., I think you should maybe start seeing

a shrink. Compulsive hand washing is a symptom of an obsessive guilt complex.

In other words, you did something bad and it's driving you crazy. Your brain is telling you to wash the evil deed off your hands, but of course, we all know it never really goes away... does it, J.G., no, it just hides deep in the recesses of your subconscious, waiting for another chance to come slithering out... drenching your poor, battered psyche with wave after wave of guilt.

So tell your Mom you like wearing her dresses and you'll start to feel better.

RANTS!

RANT "I hate when developers just rush out something because they have the new graphics engine and all they want to see is how fancy they can make the environment/characters/models look while skimping on gameplay. People buy these games to play, not to look at!" —Jay Millen, London, UK

RANT "When it comes to the handheld war between PSP vs. DS, the DS is whipping the PSP left and right because there are no original games on the PSP! We are getting nothing but ports of the games that we already own or played on our PS2s!" —Hugo, Conestoga, Lancaster, PA

RANT "This is to all you game developers out there. What's up with all the M-rated games? The number of mature rated games seems to be rising. At this rate, in a few years everything will be rated mature! I'm only 13 and I can't play a lot of good games because they are rated M. The way I see it, a game doesn't need blood, sex, and gore to be good. There are even FPSs that could easily be rated T if developers would reduce the amount of blood in them. Wouldn't it widen your audience? Wouldn't that make you more money? What's the deal? The day I see a good story-driven FPS like *Half-Life* with a T rating is the day I cry tears of joy!" —Preston Lynn, San Antonio, TX

RANT "I'm mad about having to wait until March 2006 for *MGS3: Subsistence*! It's the only thing that can get me through the wait for *MGS4* and *PS3*! I gave away my original *MGS3: Snake Eater* because I thought *Subsistence* was coming in November 2005. Grumble, grumble..." —Ariane Bouchard, Annapolis, MD

—Nova Scotia, Canada

Rant or Rave at psmonline.com

FANDOM

Step up and share your mad love for PS2 with the world!

AND THE WINNER IS...

Gabriel Timothy Lim comes away as PSM's best fan artist of 2005. His work appeared in multiple issues, but it was his excellent rendition of *Gungrave* lead character *Beyond The Grave*, below, that sealed the deal. Way to go!



Gabriel Timothy Lim's *Beyond The Grave*.

HIT US WITH YOUR BEST STUFF!

Get over to psmonline.com and submit your displays of fandom — fan art, cosplay, custom toys... you name it, we want it! This best of the best will be displayed here each issue!

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PlayStation 2



Codemasters



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Pitch the Pros

Your game ideas — reviewed by PS2's top game makers!

"Gold Rink"

Hockey's scary enough *with* protective gear, but this is just crazy. Well, not as crazy as if the puck had blades!

DI have an idea for a new game called *Cold Rink*. It's just like hockey... except with no protection... and it's jammed full of obstacles.

The point is to take the puck, overcome the obstacles, and drive the puck into the net. Pretty simple — except if you get hit, your player takes damage, and if he takes enough, he is dead for the remainder of the game.

For the obstacles you will have to either jump over or smash your way through big brick walls. The obstacles are set up so the other team will have an advantage to take the puck if you're knocked down from hitting one of the many obstacles.

Your character will be able to get into fights and your guy does grab onto anything around him and use it to win (ex: skates). The games are timed just like in hockey, so, if it's a tie, the two best players will battle it out to the death. —ANDREW VITALEK, SUDBURY, ONTARIO, CANADA



Illustration by Ryan Kinnear

THIS MONTH'S PRO:

KRAIG KUJAWA
Designer, Midway
He designed
Blitz: The League



Smashing through brick walls to score before you die? Sounds a little like *Mad Max: Beyond Thunderdome* meets *Super Mario* without the fuss and muss of Tina Turner. But in all seriousness, it's hard to argue that a world of hockey without cups wouldn't at least be half entertaining... for the spectators. After all, a good

shot to the nuts joke is always good for a cheap laugh, even for the worst of movies. One thing I wonder most about with this concept is how teams would have enough guys to make it through an entire game with all of the injuries and death in this game or how one character could survive long enough to play in multiple matches and have a career. Sounds like the design character building and his defenses could be really important to this game's fun and success. In *Blitz: The League*, guys are able to play through the pain like in real life — by injected pain killers. I'd hate to see the treatment for a puck to the groin injury in this game. Ouch.

The game idea sounds like a lot of fun in a pure, primal way, and as a designer I'd be keen to play it. But I think the game's world

could use a little more continuity with the real hockey world to make it more understandable to gaming masses and hockey fans. Having skates as weapons is a good start. But how about instead of brick walls to smash through, there are ice bricks? Or even better, Zambonis that run into you.

**VERDICT:
APPROVED**

Check out psmonline.com for details on how you can pitch the pros with your own game idea — and win a PSM prize pack if they greenlight your idea!

“★★★★★”

MAXIM



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getting up

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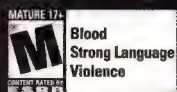
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PlayStation 2



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FEBRUARY'S BIG RELEASES

PSM PLAYLIST

CHRIS

I've been keeping busy (having fun!) by playing 2005's best games, sneaking a little (okay, a lot) of *Ridge Racer 6* on Xbox 360 when I can. Right now, I'm most jazzed to whoop the rest of the team's butts in *Metal Gear Online*. Bring it on, suckas!



RANDY

Replaying *Devil May Cry 3: Special Edition* just made me realize even more

what an amazing game it was... and still is. *Star Wars Battlefront II* has been eating up my time as I wait in eager anticipation of *MGS3: Subsistence* and *Tomb Raider: Legend*. Snake and Lara can't return soon enough!



KAISER

I'm actually not playing that much right now since we're slowly headed into that

dead period of releases, so I'm sure I'll use this time to catch up on all those games sitting in my closet at home. Until *Splinter Cell: Double Agent* comes out anyways...



JUSTIN

It's been a busy time for us with the move, so I haven't had a lot of time to play anything. I guess I've been spending most of my time playing *WWE SmackDown! Vs. RAW 2006* on PSP. I'm looking forward to playing *Tomb Raider: Legend* and *Onimusha: Dawn of Dreams*.



READER PLAYLIST

EDWIN RIVERA, SABANA GRANDE, PR

I've been playing *Soulcalibur III* like a madman. The game is a solid fighter, but the real gem in this one is the sheer amount of variety it has. Overall it's a great fighter with a lot of replay

action and it makes a great gift for all those annoying brothers and or sisters that never leave you alone.



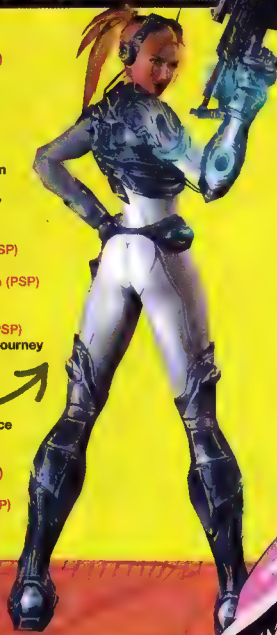
2/1 .hack//G.U.

50 Cent: Bulletproof (PSP)
Advent Shadow (PSP)
Bounty Hounds (PSP)
Cowboy Bebop
Curious George
Daxter (PSP)
EyeToy: Chat
Full Spectrum Warrior: Ten Hammers
Gender Mountains Trophy
Ghost Recon: Advanced Warfighter
Guilty Gear: Judgment (PSP)
Hummer

Mortal Kombat Deception (PSP)
MotoGP 4

Payout Poker & Casino
Payout Poker & Casino (PSP)
River King: A Wonderful Journey
Sandlot Basketball
Sandlot Football
Sandlot Hockey
StarCraft: Ghost
Stargate SG-1: The Alliance
Tales of Legendia
Teen Titans

TOCA Race Driver 2 (PSP)
TOCA Race Driver 3
Tomb Raider: Legend (PSP)
Untold Legends: The Warrior's Code



2/7

Arena Football
Street Fighter Alpha 3 MAX (PSP)

2/14

Black
Fight Night Round 3
Fight Night Round 3 (PSP)
Final Fight: Streetwise
Marc Ecko's Getting Up: Contents Under Pressure
Rugby 06

2/21

Sonic Riders

2/27

Field Commander

2/28

24: The Game
FIFA Street 2
FIFA Street 2 (PSP)
Generation of Chaos (PSP)
Neopets: Petpet Adventure
Stacked with Daniel Negreanu
Stacked with Daniel Negreanu
World Soccer Winning Eleven 9 (PSP)
World Tour Soccer Winning Eleven 9

FUTURE OUTLOOK

MARCH

3/1

AND1 Streetball
beatmania
Chulip
Commandos Strike Force
Drakengard 2
Fear & Respect
Grandia III
Jaws Unleashed
Kingdom Hearts II
Metal Gear ACID 2 (PSP)
Metal Gear Solid 3: Subsistence
Okami

Pursuit Force (PSP)

Splinter Cell 4
Suikoden V
Winback 2: Project Poseidon
World Poker Tour (PSP)
Ys: The Ark of Napishtim (PSP)

3/7

Godfather: The Game
Shadow Hearts: From the New World

3/14

From Russia With Love (PSP)
Onimusha: Dawn of Dreams
Splinter Cell 4 (PSP)

3/27

Def Jam Fight for NY (PSP)
NFL Head Coach

3/28

Metal Saga
Viewtiful Joe: Red Hot Rumble (PSP)

APRIL

4/1

Bully
Dance Factory
Tomb Raider: Legend

4/15

Battlestations: Midway

4/25

Atelier Iris 2

MAY

5/1

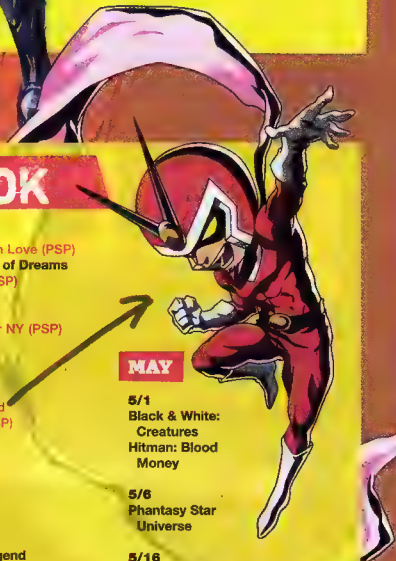
Black & White:
Creatures
Hitman: Blood Money

5/6

Phantasy Star
Universe

5/16

Steambot Chronicles



i play. i win. i gloat. i kick back. i catch a movie.
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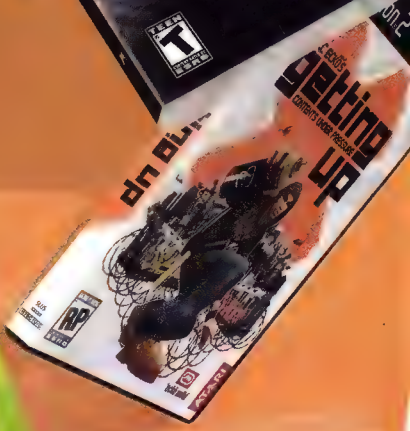
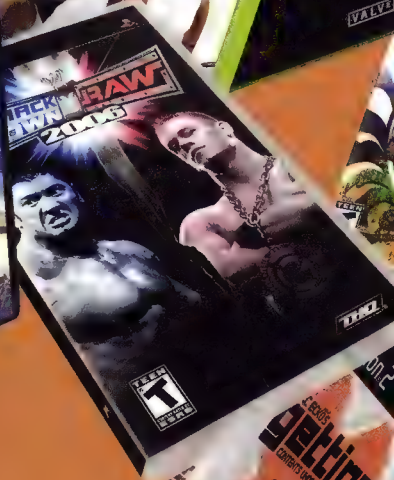
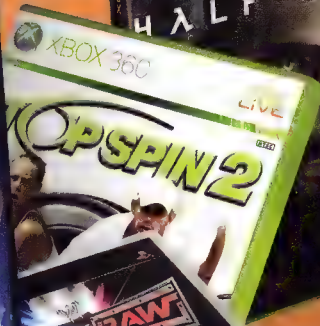


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SAY WHAT?!

Our favorite funny quotes from PS2's biggest stars

I



DEVIL MAY CRY 3

Dante: You want a date? Well forget it, because I make a note not to go out with women who shoot me in the head!

TRUE CRIME: NEW YORK CITY

Marcus Reed: You've got the right to an attorney, and some other s--- I don't remember.



“IS THERE ANY WAY TO TAKE OFF MY PANTS?”

METAL GEAR SOLID 3: SNAKE EATER

Para-Medic: Snake, look at your body!

Snake: Yep... lookin' good.

Para-Medic: Not there.

Snake: Then where?

Para-Medic: You have leeches all over your body!

President Johnson: You are above even The Boss. I hereby award you the title of "Big Boss."

Eva: OK, your Raikov disguise is complete. Now they won't stop you no matter what you do.

Snake: Even if I punch someone in the face?

Eva: Right.

Snake: Really?

Eva: Really.

Snake: Why?

Eva: Raikov's just that kind of guy.

Snake: I'm glad I'm not as strange as the Major.

Para-Medic: The Major's not strange...

Major Zero: [In the background] My tea's gone! Who's drunk it? How am I supposed to have teatime without tea?

Para-Medic: Well, not *that* strange...

Major Zero: [In the background] My score's gone, too!

Sigint: [When Snake calls him wearing nothing on his upper body] Whatever. You do what you want.

Snake: I will. Just one question, though.

Sigint: What's that?

Snake: Is there any way to take off my pants?

Sigint: Say what?

Snake: My pants, can I...?

Sigint: Ah, *hell*, no! This FOX unit's a nutfest!

Snake: He, he, he.



GRAND THEFT AUTO: SAN ANDREAS

Zero: As long as we have opposable thumbs, we will fight you!

Big Smoke: Like it says in the book, "we are both blessed and cursed."

Carl Johnson: What f----- book?

Big Smoke: [After escaping the police] S---! That's gonna be a hell of a story to tell later on when we're passin' the blunt!

Catalina: Are you going to fight for my love?

Carl Johnson: No. I can take rejection.

[Cesar gives Carl a gun.]

Carl Johnson: Where'd you get that?

Cesar: Same place I buy my pants, Holmes. This is America!

Lianne Forget: Recently, a large field of marijuana in Flint County was set on fire. This has been rather unfortunate for the local wildlife, most of which was found eating chocolate, listening to the same band over and over, and buying fractal art.

Ken Rosenberg: Hey, just like old times, huh, Tommy?

Carl Johnson: Who the f--- is Tommy?

Carl Johnson: Does the Pope s--- in the woods?

Cesar: Why you always saying that? I already told you, where the holiness does his business, is his business.

[Carl is about to sneak onboard an aircraft carrier.]

Mike Toreno: Okay, Carl. Once you get in, I cannot help you.

Carl Johnson: Can you help me now?

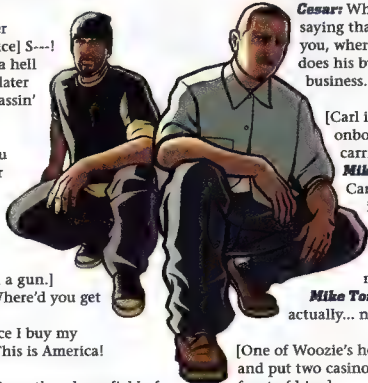
Mike Toreno: Um... no, actually... no.

[One of Woozie's henchmen enter and put two casino chips down in front of him.]

Woozie: One's a fake.

Carl Johnson: That's amazing. You didn't even touch them!

Woozie: No, I just took a guess. Why else would he come in with two chips and sound so worried?



“ I HAVE JUST OFFICIALLY RUN OUT OF WAYS TO SAY “OW.” ”

ULTIMATE SPIDER-MAN

Peter Parker: I am so scared I can't even finish my stupid joke.

[The Green Goblin throws Spidey through a roof.]

Spider-Man: I have just officially run out of ways to say "Ow."

Johnny Storm: [Racing Spider-Man:] Madam Web is faster than you, and I don't even get the reference.

Peter Parker: Come on!
Mary Jane: It's not done.
Peter Parker: I need it.
Mary Jane: It's really not done. Look, I have to fix a hole in the butt and I'll be done with it.
Peter Parker: I... can explain the hole in the butt.
Mary Jane: Please don't.

Spider-Man: [As Silver Sable helps him save people] Hey, weren't you trying to kill me just a minute ago?
Silver Sable: I was hired to capture you, not harm innocent civilians.
Peter Parker: Aw, you're a crazy lady with a heart of gold.

“ I SEE THAT THE PRESIDENT HAS ALSO ARMED HIS DAUGHTER WITH... BALLISTICS ”

RESIDENT EVIL 4

Luis: [Ogling Ashley] I see that the President has also armed his daughter with... ballistics.

Hamon: I've sent my right hand to destroy you.

Leon: Your right hand comes off?

Leon: [After a parasite possessed him to choke Ada] ...Sorry.

Ashley: [After Leon makes her jump down a garbage chute] Are you out of your mind?

Leon: I knew you'd be okay if you fell on your butt.

Leon: [The crowd of zombie-like villagers that were chasing him have just walked away at the sound of a bell] Where are they going? Bingo?





SASHA NEIN:
YOUNG MAN, I HOPE
YOU'VE LEARNED A
LESSON HERE TODAY.

RAZ: YES, I HAVE...
THAT SHOOTING
THINGS IS FUN AND
USEFUL!



PSYCHONAUTS

Coach Oleander: Is your name "Joey?"

Raz: No.

Coach Oleander: Because I'm going to call you "Slow Joey."

Raz: That's not my name.

Coach Oleander: What's that, Slow? I can't hear you! You're talkin' too slow!

Raz: So... this is it. The mental world.

Elton Fir: It looks like a dentist's office.

Raz: A mental dentist's office.

Dr. Loboto: They bad news is that we're going to have to remove your brain and place it in an armored tank to shoot down innocent civilians with its psychic death beam. The good news is that your insurance is gonna cover the whole thing.

Boyd Cooper: Beware the cows! Not all milk is enriched!

Raz: A deranged madman is building an army of psychic soldiers to take over the world! And there's no one who can stop him but us!

Lilli Zanotto: Oh my God! Let's make out!

Sasha Nein: Young man, I hope you've learned a lesson here today.

Raz: Yes, I have... that shooting things is fun and useful!



SPLINTER CELL: CHAOS THEORY

Sam Fisher: [Grabbing a guy from behind at a Japanese tea house] Bad news.

Guard: Agh! I knew it! I knew there were ninjas around here!

Sam Fisher: What?

Guard: Yeah, you've gotta be a ninja. How else could you sneak up and grab me like that?

Sam Fisher: Listen, I don't know what —

Guard: Wow! A real, live, ninja! I can't believe it!

Sam Fisher: Listen, I'm going to kill you if —

Guard: Wow! Killed by a ninja... cool!

Anna: The Maria Narcissa.

Sam Fisher: Sounds like you're setting me up for another blind date.

Anna: The Maria Narcissa is a boat.

Sam Fisher: So was the last girl you set me up with.

Anna: Fisher!

Sam Fisher: Sorry.

Sam Fisher: Lambert, now that I got 50 million bucks with me, it's time to talk about a raise.

Irving Lambert: Hmm. 25 cents an hour and not a penny more.

Sam Fisher: Deal.

Guard: Who are you?

Sam Fisher: I'm the good guy here to save your world.

Guard: I thought I was the good guy.

Sam Fisher: No, you're the side with the super secret underground base, and I'm the guy who's trying to break into the base, which makes me the good guy.

RATCHET & CLANK: UP YOUR ARSENAL

[Skrunch grunts]

Captain Qwark: I thought we agreed to put that forest business behind us.

[Skrunch grunts]

Captain Qwark: It was mating season, how was I supposed to know she was your sister? ...Er... how long have you two been standing there?

Clank: Too long.



ILLUSTRATION BY [unreadable]



“ THIS SKY IS NOT PRETTY AT ALL, IT'S ROUGH AND MASCULINE — POSSIBLY SWEATY. ”

KAT-AMARI DAMACY

King of All Cosmos: This sky is not pretty at all, it's rough and masculine — possibly sweaty.

King of All Cosmos: We broke it. Yes, we were naughty. Completely naughty. So, so very sorry. But just between you and us, it felt quite good.

[Item Description]: Soccer Player — Professional at playing with balls. This must be a very valuable Earthling skill, considering his salary.

TIMESPLITTERS: FUTURE PERFECT

Jo-Beth Casey: [Climbing through the window] There's no way I'm backing out now, so you can either help me or get out of my way.

Sgt. Cortez: Fine... but I'm using the front door.

Dr. Lance: Time to unleash the Asskickulator.



“ YOU WANT A PERCH? ”

JAK 3

Daxter: You want a perch? [Makes an insulting hand gesture to Pecker, the bird]

Daxter: Twirl on it!

Baron Praxis: Games? Games are for wimps! Get out in the real world! It's called the “sun!”

Kliver: Care to wager a little somethin' on a race, then? If you win, I'll let you keep that little vehicle for as long as you live. And if I win...?

Jak: I don't have anything.

Kliver: I'd say that yappy rodent of yours is a bit bony, but skinned and buttered he'd make a nice treat. My vehicle against him.

Daxter: Forget it buddy! Jak would never —

Jak: Done.

THE PUNISHER

Frank Castle: [After tossing the Russian through a window] Dasvidanya.

Frank Castle: [Watching the Russian stand up and run away] That's not good.

Detective Soap: So, how may people *have* you killed?

Frank Castle: I don't know. There were a lot of explosions.

Kingpin: I see Bullseye has failed me again.

Frank Castle: I threw him out the window.

Kingpin: You're planning to do the same with me?

Frank Castle: No. You, I'd have to roll.

Frank Castle: [After electrocuting an enemy] Only place in New York where you can still smoke indoors.



**coming
soon.**



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FROM THE CREATORS OF

PC GAMER



PSM
THE ENTERTAINMENT WEEKLY MAGAZINE

2005'S BEST GAMES

THE
PSM

IT ALL COMES DOWN TO THIS: WHICH GAME WILL CLAIM OUR #1 SPOT?

10

Swearing, shouting, raised fists, and even the occasional thrown chair. No, we're not describing a re-run of the Jerry Springer show; we're talking about the heated process by which the editorial staff of PSM comes together, every February issue, to decide upon the 10 best games of the previous year.

Thankfully, no one has gotten seriously injured... yet. The only thing to come out of our raucous meetings have been nine sets of the greatest games you've ever played,

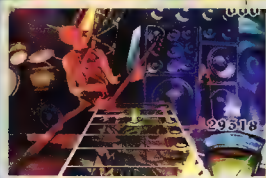
including the one you're about to begin reading. Why is picking a measly 10 games so tough, you ask? Because there are literally dozens of games released every year that earn our must-buy stamp of approval: a score of 8.0 or higher out of a coveted (but never truly "perfect" 10).

Even when you narrow it down to the 9.0s and higher, the competition is heated. So, we gather like some sort of gaming congress for days, arguing for why a certain game should make it into the final

10. Then there's the matter of how they're ranked from there. Luckily, we can rely on math for that one. We all put the final 10 games in the order we individually believe they should rank, and then are given points accordingly. We tally those up, and the final list is almost done.

It's never so cut-and-dry, though, and this year's choice for Game of The Year is a perfect example. In fact, it's probably the toughest (and closest) call we've had to make in all these years. Betcha can't guess what it was...

10



GUITAR HERO

Developer: Harmonix
Publisher: Red Octane

PSM SAYS: Japanese gamers have been enjoying Konami's seemingly unending series of *Guitar Freaks* music games for years, and this year we finally got in on the fun of playing like rock gods on a guitar-shaped controller. The game may be different — J-pop's out and heavy metal's in — as may be the publisher, but the team behind *Karaoke Revolution*, Harmonix, gifted Red Octane with a truly inspired game that is, when all is said and done, just incredibly fun and rewarding to play. There's nothing else like it on the system (until *Guitar Freaks* finally comes over... hint-hint, Konami) and anyone who doesn't think it's a blast is fun-challenged.

FROM THE CREATORS: "The *Guitar Hero* team is thrilled to have our creation make the PSM 10. Last year, we set out to make a game that we would be excited to play ourselves, and that would communicate our deep love of loud rock music and screaming guitar. We have been stunned by the enthusiastic response we've gotten from the gaming community, and we are deeply gratified that our urge to rock is shared by so many. We hope that *Guitar Hero* will introduce some players to great music you weren't aware of, and hopefully inspire some of you to pick up a real guitar. Remember, play it loud! Yours in Rock," —**HARMONIX, GUITAR HERO DEVELOPMENT TEAM**

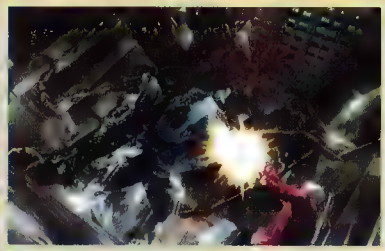
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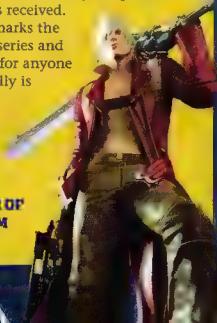
DEVIL MAY CRY 3: DANTE'S AWAKENING

Developer: Capcom
Publisher: Capcom

PSM SAYS: 2005 marked a truly triumphant comeback for one of gaming's greatest heroes ever. Dante (actually, there's still some debate over whether it was really him or not) wasn't looking so hot in *Devil May Cry 3*, but in the third chapter of the series he slashed and shot his way back into action in a game that many thought was way too difficult, but pretty much everyone who played it came away thinking it was a masterpiece in all respects. From the crazy, new, over-the-top moves to the gorgeous and expertly designed action backdrops and enemies, this really is a love letter to the action game. Capcom's readying its love letter to *DMC3* fans with a special edition release in January, and you can read our full review later in this issue.



FROM THE CREATORS: "We're thrilled that *Devil May Cry 3* made the PSM 10. Dante's unique style and unflappable attitude continue to make him one of the most revered heroes in the world of video games. We've been overwhelmed by the positive response this game has received. *Devil May Cry 3* truly marks the pinnacle of the entire series and is a definite must play for anyone who likes games. It really is an intense, rewarding experience for anyone that loves action, excitement and just outright cool gameplay." —**TODD THORSON, DIRECTOR OF MARKETING, CAPCOM ENTERTAINMENT**



8



BURNOUT REVENGE

Developer: Criterion Games
Publisher: Electronic Arts

PSM SAYS: PS2 was hit by a torrent of racing games in 2005, but none was as fast and fun as *Burnout Revenge*. Sure, it didn't have big, open cities or real cars with handling simulated to the nth degree, but it made no excuses; it ran hard, mean, and offered up the most thrills you could find on four wheels. Obligatory graphic improvements aside, the game smoked the competition — and its previous installments — with amazing courses, cooler car designs, and a spit-polished sheen to the gameplay that made it "you'll have to pry this controller from my hands" material. More shortcuts, new types of takedowns, and a crash mode so intense it haunted our sleep for weeks were just the icing on one expertly baked, car-shaped cake.

FROM THE CREATORS: "So the *Burnout* team is really honored — and relieved — that *Revenge* has made it into the PSM 10. It was an exceptionally difficult game to complete, mainly due to *Burnout 3* winning so much acclaim and awards throughout the development of *Revenge*. We always set out to push and innovate every aspect of the game experience so we're glad that people have enjoyed the game as much as we enjoyed creating and developing it." —**ALEX WARD, CREATIVE DIRECTOR, CRITERION GAMES**

7



PETER JACKSON'S KING KONG

Developer: Ubisoft Montpellier
Publisher: Ubisoft

PSM SAYS: You could say that Michel Ancel, director of the truly gargantuan undertaking that is *Peter Jackson's King Kong*, has come a long way from being "the guy who made *Rayman*." In fact, you can see the same amazing knack for game design that won us over in the *Rayman* games and *Beyond Good & Evil* in every nook and cranny of this game. Sure, *King Kong* is a first-person game, but it's not a cheap, run-and-gun movie tie-in – not by a billion miles. It's an action-adventure in the truest sense of the term. When you play it, you're not just reenacting the movie; you're in the movie. Actually, you feel like you're in the world that's in the movie. It's that convincing and engrossing. It's a beautiful but often terrifying game that challenges your skills – not to mention your ability to concentrate on play when you just want to gaze at the scenery – around every corner. Movie games have been stigmatized as generally below-average for decades; *King Kong* just caused a paradigm shift.

6



SOULCALIBUR III

Developer: Namco
Publisher: Namco

PSM SAYS: In 2005, Namco released not one, but two of the best fighting games ever – arcade or console. *Tekken 5* is among our very favorite games in the genre, but *Soulcalibur III* earned its place in the PSM 10 for several reasons, not the least of which is an incredible amount of depth... not just to the gameplay, but the game as a whole. All the stops were pulled out to make this an immensely lasting experience. As a competitive game between two people it's good enough, but the variety of single-player attractions is just great. From the Risk-like campaign mode to the surprisingly flexible create-a-player, this is a game that is easy for fighting game newcomers to enjoy, yet deeply rewarding for the hardcore fan. Online play may definitely have bumped it up in the list, but the lack of it doesn't change the fact that this is one of the greatest fighters of all time.

THE CREATORS SAY: "Thank you for the honor. This year, 2005, marks the 10th year for the *Soul* series. Even after 10 years, to be honored with such an award is all because of the fans. We hope you keep supporting the *SOULCALIBUR* series for years to come too!" –**HIROAKI YOTORIYAMA, PRODUCER, NAMCO**



SPECIAL ACHIEVEMENT AWARDS

BEST GRAPHICS

Resident Evil 4



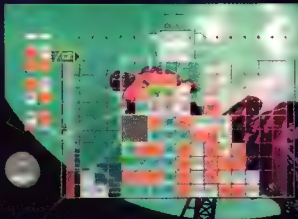
BEST SOUND EFFECTS

Peter Jackson's King Kong



BEST MUSIC

Lumines (PSP)



5



PSYCHONAUTS

Developer: Double Fine
Publisher: Majesco

PSM SAYS: It's now 2006, and if you have yet to play this remarkable platformer / adventure game hybrid, it's a damned shame. It sprang from the mind of creator Tim Schafer, most famously known for his work at LucasArts on one of the best adventure games of all time, *Grim Fandango*. *Psychonauts* is Schafer's imagination run wild: colorful, yet twisted... dark, yet incredibly funny... but not the least bit overboard. There was an almost immeasurable amount of care that went into the gameplay and visual design on *Psychonauts*, and it shows from the opening movie through every clever level that Pixar's top talent would be proud of. With its mix of psychic skills, puzzles, action, and top-shelf dialog, there's really nothing else like it anywhere. We'd love to see its very memorable cast return for a sequel, and with Schafer's talented crew already working on PS3, we can only hope our wishes come true.

FROM THE CREATORS: "Holy cow! We won something! Awesome! Man, I just have to sit down and relax after all that." —**TIM SCHAFFER, FOUNDER, DOUBLE FINE**

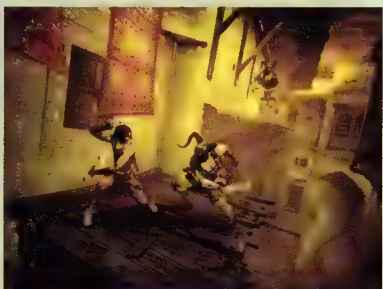
4 PRINCE OF PERSIA: THE TWO THRONES



Developer: Ubisoft Montreal
Publisher: Ubisoft

PSM SAYS: The third *Prince of Persia* game on PS2 is one of those rare creations that combines everything everyone loved in the first two games in a series and throws out pretty much everything everyone hated. The result is a thrilling action-adventure that truly balances both sides of the genre combination. The acrobatic-based puzzle exploration of the first game has been improved many fold, while the combat has been made more engaging than in the second installment. Nothing in the game seems like filler; every area and scene shows expert game design. The scope is larger, the gameplay deeper, and the story better than ever before. It's not an extremely long game, but every single minute is memorable. Years from now, this will still be remembered as one of the greatest action-adventure games made, and that's more than enough to warrant a top-five finish.

FROM THE CREATORS: "Thank you, PSM, for this fantastic honor and all of your support over the years. We feel that with *Prince of Persia: The Two Thrones*, the *Prince* series has reached new heights and once again raised the bar not only for itself, but the genre as a whole. We'd also like to graciously thank all the fans for their amazing support for this legendary franchise, as without them, there simply would be no *Prince*. Also, I'd personally like to give recognition to the Montreal development team because this game wouldn't have been possible without their wonderful talent, unbreakable dedication, and truly creative vision. This award is really dedicated to all of them." —**BEN MATTES, PRODUCER, UBISOFT**



BEST ART DESIGN
Shadow of The Colossus

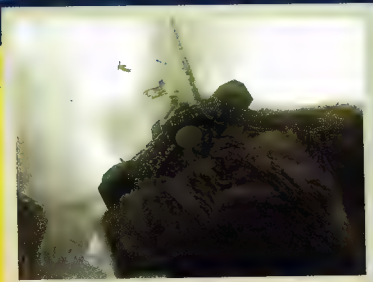


BEST CHARACTERS
Psychonauts



BEST STORY
God of War





SHADOW OF THE COLOSSUS

Developer:
Sony Computer
Entertainment
Publisher:
Sony Computer
Entertainment
America

PSM SAYS: When you find out that a game is being made by the same people who dreamt up the endlessly sublime and atmospheric classic, *ICO*, you know you're in for something very special. The concept of man versus giant is as old as the Bible, and while many have tried to convey this in a game, they all stand in the very tall shadow of Sony's internal development staff. Their mission was simple on paper – control a character that battles giants – but truly awesome

in execution. The art style of the bleak world the hero traverses on horseback to track down his enormous quarry will go down as the most hauntingly beautiful ever seen in a game. The gameplay, which sees him confronting the colossi, which, in themselves and their surroundings are both puzzles and levels, is smart, tense, and unmistakably original. The entire adventure, from opening

shot to final fade-out, is what games are all about: taking us into another world and letting us do things we could only dream of in this one. In that, we feel like the hero, and inhabit the world. Simply amazing.



BEST CINEMATICS

Devil May Cry 3



BEST REPLAY VALUE

Guitar Hero



BEST ORIGINAL GAME

Shadow of The Colossus



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- Maxim Magazine



"CLEARLY...THE LEXUS OF PSP CASES"
- Pocket Games

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RESIDENT EVIL 4

Developer:
Capcom
Publisher:
Capcom

PSM SAYS: Born on the original PlayStation, the *Resident Evil* series introduced the world to Capcom's own breed of spooky action game: the "survival horror" experience. Series creator Shinji Mikami did something with the series' fourth installment that few game makers ever get to, and it had to make his bosses very, very nervous. He decided to change it. No more zombies? New controls? Heck, it barely looks or plays like the first three "main" *RE* games. Oh, what a good thing that is.

RE4 kept just enough of its precursor's trappings to remain familiar, but Mikami stepped in – who knows how far into the project – and decided that a prettier looking version of the same old thing just wasn't acceptable. Not to him, and, most importantly, not to gamers. The result is a proverbial breath of fresh air. New life has been given in a massive shot to a series that some feared was doomed to carry on in cookie-cutter-design form for another 25 sequels. Thankfully, that wasn't the case.

Still an action game at its heart, *RE4* has a setting, plot, and set pieces one would expect from one of



the best Hollywood action movies. Only you're controlling almost every aspect of it... even during the cinemas. Great credit goes to the level designers and planners who dream up every scenario you face, because, like a good movie, there's just one memorable – but not repetitious – scene after the next.

Doubtlessly, *RE4* deserves to go down as one of the best videogames ever created. It will be looked back upon decades from now and still hold up against the best games of the future. Let's just hope that the next generation of game designers appreciate and learn from what Mikami has done with it.



BEST VOICE ACTING

God of War

BEST ONLINE GAME

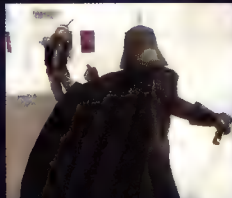
Star Wars Battlefront II

MOST IMPROVED SEQUEL

Resident Evil 4

BEST USE OF A LICENSE

Peter Jackson's King Kong



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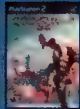


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GOD OF WAR

Developer:
Sony Computer
Entertainment
Santa Monica
Publisher:
Sony Computer
Entertainment
America
Director: David
Jaffe
Art Directors:
Terry Smith and
Steve Caterson
**Lead
Programmer:**
Tim Moss

PSM SAYS: At the beginning of this feature, we said that the decision of which game would be our Game of The Year for 2005 was one of the toughest and closest in the history of PSM. In the end, one stood triumphantly on top of the heap, like a Spartan warrior atop the bodies of his fallen foes. That game is *God of War*.

More than three years in the making, it's a game that not only pushes the PlayStation 2 to its limits, but also the very founding concepts of the action game. If you can think of something you've done in an action game that game before *God of War*, it was probably

reinvented in this game. From the timing-based mini-games in combat to the game world purely devoid of repetition, from the ungodly combos possible with Kratos' Blades of Chaos to the ability to fight while climbing a cliff side or

Kratos is, without a doubt, the best new videogame characters of this generation. He the right design and attitude to carry him through (hopefully) many adventures to come.



Countless enemies dwarf the anti-hero, cementing the fact that this is a tale of one man's rage overcoming seemingly insurmountable adversaries.





Just because he's a tough guy, Kratos knows when he's outmatched. Thankfully, he possesses acrobatic skills to avoid killing blows.

making your way hand-over-hand across a rope. Everything about *God of War* felt great, felt fresh, and felt fun – even the tiniest of details.

It's a game that's all about the details. Director David Jaffe said he'd dreamt about making this game for years, and it shows. It's just packed with pie-in-the-sky ideas put into action. Loaded with one-off gameplay elements that took ages to design and program, only to be seen once, but so very worth the effort.

It's glaringly clear to anyone who embarks on this ancient Greek action epic – and if you haven't, get

off you ass right now and buy a copy – that Jaffe is a game maker who has had his life made more enjoyable by videogames and that *God of War* is his gift back to the hobby. With it, he and his talented, hard working team have established themselves as the next great makers of epic games. *God of War* is a landmark game for PS2 and videogames in general. It is, in a word, classic.



This isn't the most welcoming sight when arriving at a new game level. It's dreadful, and that's what Jaffe wanted.

From the cyclops (top left) to Medusa (right), the game takes legendary Greek beasts and makes them cooler than hell.



WARNING: SPOILER S! READ AT YOUR OWN RISK!

DIRECTOR'S COMMENTARY

of GOD OF WAR

with DAVID JAFFE

The director of 2005's best game takes us on a strange, but true behind-the-scenes tour of the creation, frustration, and fallout of some of its most memorable moments



Kratos

"Kratos is really me... or who I wish I could be at times: In shape, tall, strong, and bad ass. He really is an alter-ego of mine. He was designed to allow players to feel strong, brutal, and nasty; in essence, he is a device used to explore the dark side that everyone has. Even though he's a nasty prick, I still feel there's this little kid side to Kratos that just

loves tossing himself into crazy adventures with fantastic monsters, ancient tombs, and wild-ass magic. I know it makes me sound crazy, but when the game was over I had a little conversation in my mind with Kratos where I bid him farewell, wished him the best, gave him a hug, and sent him on his way. Does that make me nuts? I imagine so... but that's what I did. I kid you not."

The Hydra Battle

"We always wanted the opening of the game to be spectacular, so we waited until the tech was all in place and the team was running like a well oiled machine before we tackled this level. The problem was, as this was near the end of the game, I was exhausted from coming up with lots of other design ideas (for other levels) and it was a real struggle – gameplay-wise – to turn this into something cool. I was simply out of ideas. I remember sitting in a chair in my bedroom sketching out ideas for the Hydra and my wife was in bed because she had thrown out her back. I was so consumed with trying to make the Hydra design work and that I really did not give my wife the attention she needed or deserved. Needless to say, she was really, really ticked off. To this day, I am still repairing the damage to my marriage that that particular day caused. Stupid Hydra!"

DAVID JAFFE'S TOP 10 OF 2005

- 1 Guitar Hero (PS2)
- 2 Shadow of the Colossus (PS2)
- 3 Prince of Persia (PSP)
- 4 Gun (PS2/XBOX)
- 5 SOCOM: Fireteam Bravo (PSP)
- 6 Mortal Kombat: Shaolin Monks (PS2/XBOX)
- 7 Casino Island (YAHOO GAMES/PC)
- 8 Midnight Club 3: DUB Edition (PSP)
- 9 Ultimate Spider-Man (PS2/XBOX)
- 10 Haunting Ground (PS2)





The Sex Scene

"Making this scene funny was never the intent, but even before we put this in, I knew the sex scene would probably play as comical to 95% of players. I didn't care because I had a very strong desire to stay true to the adult nature of *God of War*, the sexual aspects of the game influenced by *Heavy Metal* magazine. So I was like: let's just go for it. Even though most players think it's just in there for laughs, I think it's a key aspect to Kratos' character (especially if you read the journal he keeps by his bed). His extreme sexual side not only plays to his animalistic nature, it is also a vice he uses to escape the horror

The Stupid Hydra (left, above) kept Jaffe awake at night and made a less-than-positive impact on his relationship with his wife.



of his past actions. The sex game was originally a *Track & Field* style



Pandora's Temple (above) introduced more new gameplay challenges.

button pound game, but Ashley – the designer who put this together – felt it played better with stick rotations and button presses. I think she was right. I'm glad she was, as this turned out to be the only action I was getting for a while considering how upset my wife was over the whole Hydra issue! Stupid Hydra."

The Desert / The Sirens

We tried to get this area working for over a year. I was obsessed with a sort of treasure hunt based on sound, but it never really came together, even in the end. 50% of players find the sirens by luck, not by sound. But it's okay, because I think the whole experience is just

so cool, so atmospheric, seeing the shape of the siren far in the distance, through the sands, as you hear that haunting song she sings. One of my favorite parts of the game."

Pandora's Temple

"I am very proud of the level design here. The way everything links up and ties back together is really – to me – the best level design work I have ever done. It was a real pain for the team to implement this part of gameplay but I think it pays off. Old-school gamers will recognize the clear influences *Yar's Revenge* and *Star Castle* had on this section of gameplay. [grin]"



Minotaur Battle

"I thought we were gods for a while after we did this boss. It's just so huge, so big, so epic. But then we



The desert scene was one big sound-based puzzle. It was used to track the Sirens' calls, although Jaffe says many players just guessed.





got in an early build of *Shadow of The Colossus* and I was like: Jaffe, shut the hell up... you ain't nothing! Still, even with that game kicking our asses in terms of bosses, I love this boss battle. It took a while for it to come together, but when it did, we are all like: yeah, that's pretty sweet! And to think, it really became something special only after we hired some of the guys who worked on *Backyard Wrestling* to come in and shape it up! Who woulda thunk?"

Hades

"This level sucks. I know it, you know it. Clearly the only folks who are not aware of how bad it is are the freaks over at PSM who gave us GAME OF THE YEAR (note to self: do they actually play the games?). Either way, I apologize for it. We play tested the living crap out of this game, over and over and over. One of the worst (but most useful)

An early version of the Kratos character model, seen here, had an omega symbol painted on his forehead.

parts of production was me sitting at home watching endless hours of video tape of players going through levels to see where they got stuck and confused and bored. It was mind numbing work but it made the game so much better. But Hades was the very last part of the game and we just didn't test it like we should have. We simply ran out of time and it shows. It happens, but I am sorry it did. But hey, it's Hades right? I mean, wouldn't you imagine Hades being a place that contains some of the worst platforming ever? Sounds like Hell to me!"

A second chance: Kratos protecting his wife and child

"Storytelling through gameplay is my favorite thing and the future – to me – of the interactive medium. So when Kratos hugs his wife and kid in order to give them some of his health, I was like: "Yes! That's so freaking cool!" I love that one of the only places we get a sense of what is left of Kratos' humanity comes during gameplay and not a cut scene.

The moving platform gameplay sequence seen below was actually cut from the game late in development due to balancing issues.

Ares Battle

"Most people don't like this battle as much as Hydra and Minotaur. They say it's not as epic and they are right, but I thought that putting the whole "save the family" story bit in the center would make up for that because we were still doing something we felt was fresh with a boss fight. Even so, most people still don't like this boss as much as the others. Ah well, what can you do? Another cool thing is how Ares and Kratos talk to each other during the fight. I had this idea back in 1993 for *Mickey Mania* and we got it in on the Sega CD version that no one played. But

I was like: "That's so cool!" These days, everyone does it, but I just had to stick it in *God of War* as I love the whole idea of conversation happening over gameplay."



Ares makes his immense presence known even in early scenes of the game.

Challenge of The Gods

"Originally we had 100 of these... ended up with like 10 or so. We just ran out of time. Still I like the idea of opening new play for folks who have won the game. Not a bad reward for winning the game, I think. Still, I do wish we had time to give more levels out to the player... and by the way, I can't beat these challenges. Not even close!"

Alternate Costumes

"Ask anyone on the game and they will tell you what a control freak I was. But in the case of the costumes, the art director was like: "Dude, just let the artists go and have some fun." I was cool with this as it clearly came after players had experienced the core game and really gotten to know who Kratos was. So I was cool with having some fun with it. My favorite is Dairy Bastard... I love that costume. And I love taking control of the camera – something players can not do – and watching Kratos get it on with the twins while wearing the cow costume. That is so freaking funny... and somewhat arousing, but maybe that's just me..."



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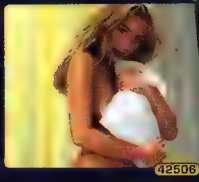
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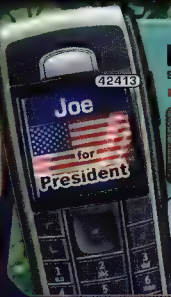
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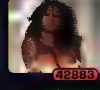
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- Top Ten**
- 82571 - Game Theme - Super Mano Bros...
 - 82578 - The Game/50 Cent - Hate It Cr...
 - 82633 - Notorious B.I.G. - Big Poppa
 - 82590 - Dr. Dre - 'Nuthin' But A G' Thang
 - 82634 - Notorious B.I.G. - Ten Crack Cam...
 - 82737 - 50 Cent - Disco Inferno
 - 82735 - 50 Cent feat. Olivia - Candy Shop
 - 82730 - Game Theme - Zelde 2
 - 82678 - TI - Bring Em Out
 - 82674 - Green Day - Bk'd Of Broken Dreams
 - 82575 - Jay-Z & Linkin Park - Numb/Encore
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 - 82739 - Gwen Stefania - Hollaback Girl
 - 82844 - Usher - Burn
 - 82576 - Fabolous - Breathe
 - 82746 - Manah-Carey - We Belong Together

- 82570 - Diara feat. Missy El ot - 1 2 Step
- 82614 - Ludacris - Rollout (My Business)
- 82615 - Ludacris - Stand Up
- 82599 - JadaKris - Knock Yourself Out
- 82671 - Amanda Perez - Angel
- 82616 - Ludacris - What's Your Fantasy
- 82635 - DJ Dirty Bastard - Get Your Money
- 82600 - Jagged Edge - Goodbye
- 82663 - Three Days Grace - Just Like You
- 82715 - Slipknot - Vermilion
- 82579 - Ruelle - Tempted To Touch
- 82627 - Monica - I Should've Known Better
- 82695 - Fabolous feat. Tamia - Into You
- 82606 - Jay-Z - Excuse Me Miss
- 82672 - Alicia Keys - Karma
- 82681 - Mase - Lookin' At Me
- 82572 - Alicia Keys - Karma
- 82713 - Simple Plan - Welcome To My Life
- 82645 - Usher - Confession Part II
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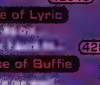
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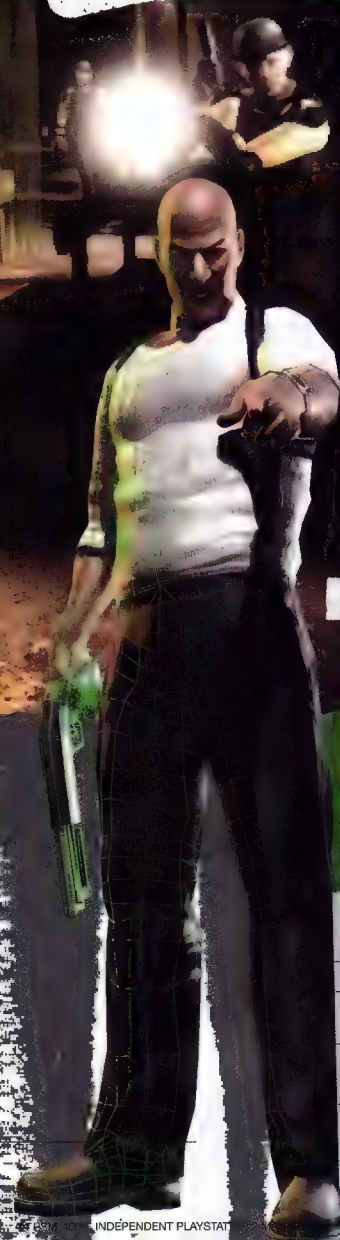
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PREVIEWS



Sam does whatever it takes to get the job done — even if it means threatening the lives of these guards.

BAUER POWER

Splinter Cell: Double Agent

Death, depression, and double lives lead Sam on his next adventure. Exclusive hands-on with the fourth sequel in this award-winning series.

SPLINTER CELL: DOUBLE AGENT

PUBLISHED BY
Ubisoft

MADE BY
Ubisoft Montreal

WHAT IS THIS?
The best in stealth action goes deep undercover.

ESRB RATING
Not yet rated

IT COMES OUT
March

MULTIPLAYER
2-player co-op/
versus

ONLINE
Affirmative

It's no secret: Ubisoft needs *Splinter Cell*. Having almost single-handedly put the French company on the gaming map, and playing a crucial role in turning it into one of the top-tier publishers in the industry, the series is one that is met with unrealistic expectations on both the development and critical sides. Yet over the course of three games, the developers have never ceased to find new ways to not only innovate the series, but also the genre as a whole, all the while technically

pushing the PS2 into regions once thought unreachable.

But as time has passed and the sequels have come and gone, the need for change has arisen. Not a complete makeover mind you — the core stealth mechanics are the game's soul, after all — but one that addresses the forgivable flaws from the previous games; most notably the convoluted and essentially needless storylines, the almost nonexistent storytelling, and the emphasis on sometimes frustrating trial-and-error gameplay.

"IT'S NO SECRET: UBISOFT NEEDS SPLINTER CELL"

A quick glance at any of these screens from the fourth game in the series, *Splinter Cell: Double Agent*, make it very apparent that Ubisoft is fully aware that *something* needs to be changed and is willing to do something about it. Thankfully, you can put to rest any fears of Sam simply becoming more aggro and rockin' to the latest nu-metal band, as past this almost jerky aesthetic change is a game where loyalties run deep, choices have dire consequences, and Sam simply becomes more human.

Sam I Am

The setup for *Double Agent* starts with Sam finding out his daughter, Sarah, is killed in a car accident. This leads Sam to depression, which leads to him being pulled from Third Echelon, which then in turn leads him to eventually being assigned a mission as a Non-Official Cover agent (NOC). This is the type of black ops mission where the risks are high, the chances of success are low, and in the end, you don't exist—to anyone. The ultimate goal of your mission is to infiltrate a terrorist group known as John Brown's Army (JBA) by going undercover and effectively becoming the enemy.

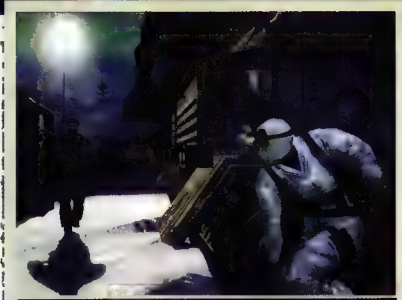
The terms of the backstory allow for a number of new elements to the traditional *Splinter Cell* gameplay, the most significant of which is a branching storyline. The allowance of choices stems from the inherent consequences of going undercover inside a terrorist group. For instance, the story has Sam pulling off some armed robberies so that he can be believably planted inside of a prison. His job there is to befriend a man named Jamie Washington, a member of the JBA, and break him out, thereby gaining both his trust and



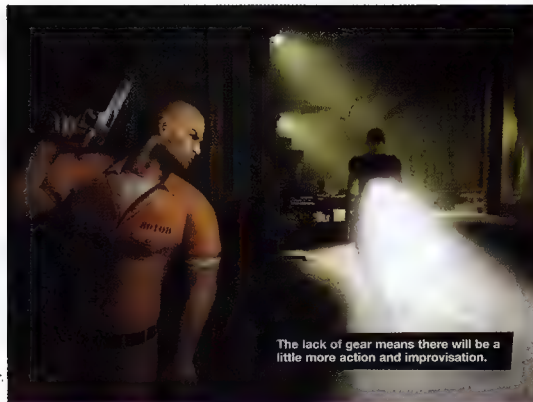
Sam is the most skilled inmate around. He's even better than Riddick!

access into the organization.

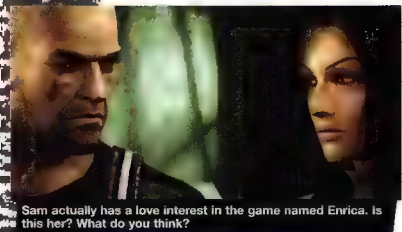
After a riot is carefully set off in the prison by a squad of Third Echelon agents, you and Jamie must escape the chaotic confines of the prison. Partway through this level, though, you and Jamie are separated. When you do eventually find him, the



See? Not everything has changed. *Double Agent* still has all the *Splinter Cell* action we're all familiar with.



The lack of gear means there will be a little more action and improvisation.



Sam actually has a love interest in the game named Enrica. Is this her? What do you think?

has a gun nudged up to the head of one of the Third Echelon agents. Now the choice is yours: do you let Jamie kill the agent, or do you stop him and damage your chances of penetrating the extremely private JBA?

While there will be other morally-tinged choices to make during the course of the game, others will emphasize the potential loss of trust within the JBA, as you'll receive conflicting orders from the JBA and Third Echelon (remember, you're undercover). A good example of this is when Sam is told by the JBA's leader, Emile Dufraisne, to steal notes from a scientist's hotel room while he meets with him and keeps him distracted. The catch is that Lambert's orders are for you to eavesdrop on the conversation that Dufraisne and the scientist are having and record the conversation. Once again, you are left in an excruciating dilemma where, depending on the choice you make, the story will branch off in wildly differing directions. This also not so subtly implies that yes, there are two different endings to the game.

Home Sweet Home

The choices you make during these pivotal moments have a greater purpose in the game, and they're all directly related to what is perhaps *Double Agent's* key new feature: an open, free-roaming level known as HQ. Essentially the headquarters for the JBA, HQ is a large, multi-floor building, complete with courtyard and roof. This environment will actually account for five of the game's missions, with access to different areas dependent on the choices you've made in the other levels.

The central area of HQ is known as the friendly zone. Here, you and other JBA members can converse freely, and it is where you will receive your JBA mission objectives from Emile. What makes this zone perhaps the most unique in the game is that there's no place to hide. Fully lit and full of NPCs, the friendly zone brings in new gameplay mechanics to a series that almost solely revolved around hiding in shadows. Due to the nature of the environment, diversionary tactics will come into play and Sam will have to maintain his cover while simultaneously completing NSA objectives given by Lambert.

A simple example explains the concept as a whole: one mission requires Sam to access information found on one of the JBA laptops. The sticky part of the situation is that he's not alone in the room. If he's seen fiddling with the laptop, the enemy will question his presence, eventually leading to a failed mission. So, in

order to complete the objective, Sam must distract the enemy using one of his new gadgets — a remote device that can interact with electronics. In this specific example, Sam can turn on a television remotely and get the information he needs while the guard walks over to see what happened.

Timing will be crucial, as you must complete your goal before the guard turns around. But let's say he catches you. In previous *Spinter Cell* games, this type of situation would lead to a mission failure, and you'd simply try and try again until you completed the objective. This trial and error gameplay, while not necessarily a fault per se, was often cited as one of the series' characteristics that people didn't like. In *Double Agent*, a solution of sorts has been found; if caught, an interactive cutscene will commence, instructing you to press a series of buttons as they're shown onscreen. Successfully complete the sequence, and you're off the hook. Fail, and suspicions will arise.

Another complicating factor in the friendly zone is that it is, well, the friendly zone. That means no

killing at any time. Still, there will be situations where you'll almost *have* to knock out an enemy. Aiding in this process is a new non-lethal gun that Sam will have available. Like the sticky shockers in previous games, this new weapon will get Sam out of some tight spots if needed without causing any human casualties.

The Other Side

We've talked much about the friendly zone of HQ. In terms of size, the friendly zone is 1/5 of the entire HQ; quite literally, as the building is separated into five distinct areas. The other four are all hostile zones, and are filled to the brim with high-end security systems and weapons. As you progress further into the game, each of the zones will open up, gradually allowing you to explore the entire HQ. But like the friendly zone, there are rules you need to abide by.

Like *Fight Club*, the first rule of the hostile zone is that you do not talk about the hostile zone. Or rather, you do not enter the hostile zone. Unlike the lively populated friendly zone, the hostile zones bring Sam back to a place

**"LIKE THE FRIENDLY ZONE
THERE ARE RULES
YOU NEED TO ABIDE BY"**



You'll have an AI-controlled co-op buddy in several missions. It all plays a lot like the co-op multiplayer.

This reminded us of Han Solo in the original *Star Wars*. Yes, we're geeks.



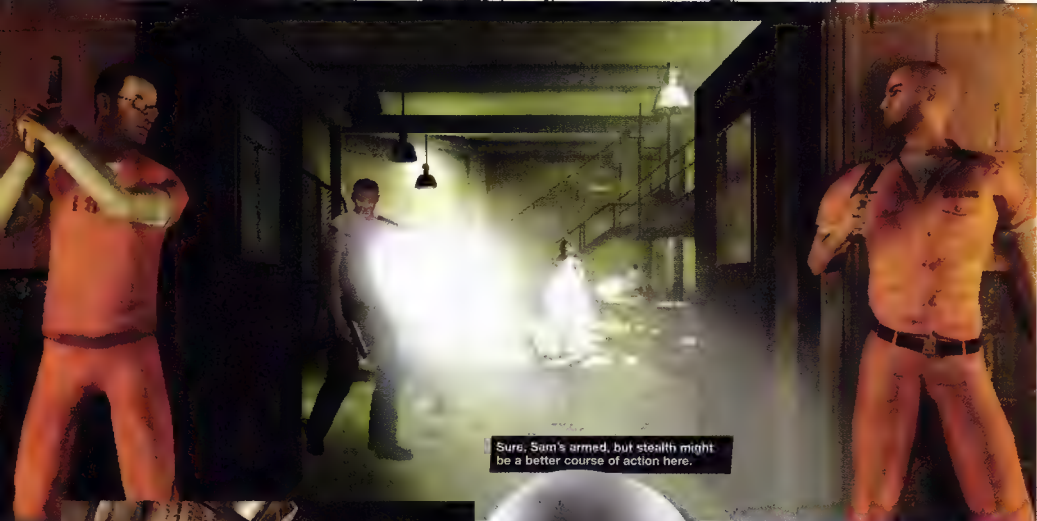
Sam is prepared for all occasions. This area clearly calls for short sleeves.

where he feels most at home — in the shadows. While the classic hide-and-seek gameplay is used in these areas, once again there are some new variables in the equation to account for and process.

To start off, your access and the level of lethal security is entirely dependent on your prior dedication to the JBA's missions. That is to say, any and all choices you make in the game will alter the state of security



Yeah, these bad guys know flashlights are more useful, but flares are more dramatic.



Sure, Sam's armed, but stealth might be a better course of action here.



In case you didn't know, Sam's a chivalrous dude.

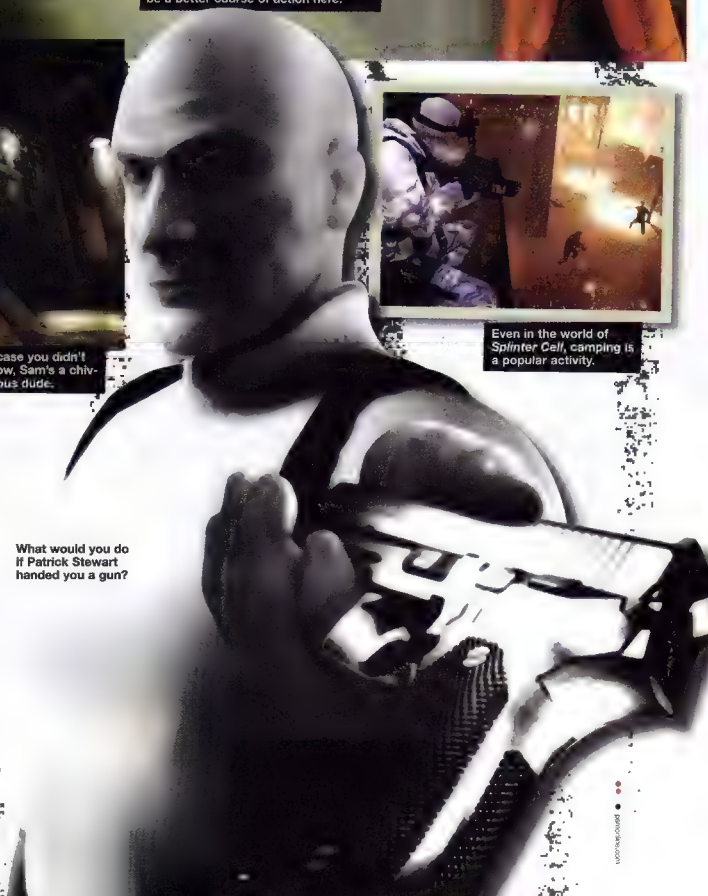


Even in the world of *Splinter Cell*, camping is a popular activity.

In the hostile zone. Outside of simply making the zones easier or more difficult to navigate, you'll feel the weight of your decisions later in the game as it's been strongly hinted to us that there are timed sessions in the hostile zones. Make a few bad calls, and watch HQ become more reserved right before your eyes.

While the specifics as to what secrets the hostile zones hold have been withheld from us, we do know a few things. One, Emile's personal quarters are located in there. Two, there will be an endless array of shortcuts and secret passageways that Sam can use to quicken and/or secure his passage. Three, knowing the time schedules of particular enemies and when and where they'll be at any given time will help you navigate through the zones. Four, there is at least one situation where you must complete objectives in the hostile zone and make it back to the friendly zone in a given amount of time. We'll

What would you do if Patrick Stewart handed you a gun?





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admit, the ambiguous nature of these details can only hint at the complexity of the HQ, but being the game's trump card, it's unlikely we'll know any more until the game ships.

Play Together

As any experienced *Splinter Cell* player knows, each game is actually more than just a singular experience, thanks to the completely realized multiplayer modes included. Like *Chaos Theory*, *Double Agent* will include the ingenious co-op mode that literally redefines what it means to work together. Each one of the two players is a vital aspect to the mission, as almost every move you make is entirely dependent on the other player. For instance, you'll have to make a human ladder to climb up to higher ground, or swipe two keycards at the same time to open a door. Even from an offensive standpoint, the cooperative nature of the missions is just brilliant, as one player sets the stage while the other executes the play.

The core of the gameplay remains the same, and like before, these missions tie into the single-player storyline. Remember the riot we mentioned that was set off by Third Echelon in the prison level? One of the co-op missions has you going into the prison and actually setting off this riot, playing out the bits and pieces of story that are only alluded

Hmm... That guy can either die by getting his throat slit, or by being tossed off a cliff... Now that's a tough decision to make.



to in the campaign. It's all quite clever, and does wonders in fleshing out the minor story details to create a cohesive and believable story.

There have been a few changes made to the co-op mode in this latest iteration. First, there are a few new moves added, including



Okay, you can look at Sam Fisher's booty, but no touching!



Lambert will give you assignments, but they may contradict the orders given to you by the bad guys. You'll have to decide which orders to follow.

The X Factor Revisited

Keen players will remember that the PS2 and Xbox versions of *Splinter Cell: Chaos Theory* differed slightly in terms of level layout and even content, as the PS2 version included the exclusive stealth water kill move, while the Xbox version featured an online co-op mode. Of course, there was the obvious contrast in graphical fidelity, too. Now, with the release of the Xbox 360, we'll be seeing three versions of *Double Agent*, each with unique features and content (and this is on top of each version's level layouts being roughly 40% different from each other). Here's how it all breaks down:

PlayStation 2: Features two completely new levels that are essentially flashbacks that Sam is having. These missions were added to give PS2 owners a little bonus for not including an online co-op mode.

Xbox: The typical graphical improvements the game runs on the *Chaos Theory* engine), as well as slightly larger environments. Online co-op is back.

Xbox 360: A significant improvement in graphics, much larger environments, significantly more NPCs, cutscenes that are fully controllable, the return of the spies-vs.-mercs multiplayer mode, a few completely new missions, and a new online team ranking system.

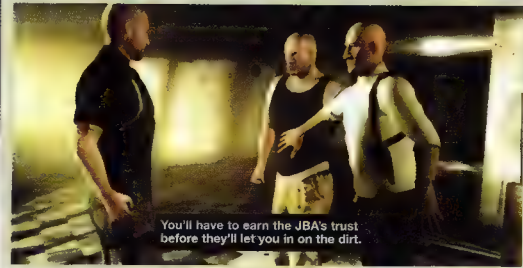


Xbox 360

Here are shots of both the PS2 and Xbox 360 version. Not bad, eh?



PlayStation 2



You'll have to earn the JBA's trust before they'll let you in on the dirt.

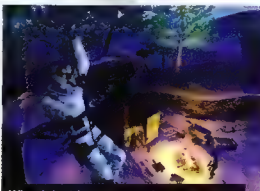
one where each player will stand against the other's back, and together they'll spider-walk up narrow vertical passages. Also, each of the mode's 13 missions is more brief and to the point when compared to *Chaos Theory* — the result of direct feedback from players.

The other multiplayer mode made famous in the *Splinter Cell* games is the spies-vs.-mercs mode. This game of cat-and-mouse broke so many rules, but was so well balanced that it was nothing less than shocking the first time you played it. What's even more shocking, though, is that this mode is entirely missing from *Double Agent* (it was not only in *Chaos Theory*, but *Pandora Tomorrow* as well, and is also included in the Xbox 360 version). Taking its place is a new spies-vs.-spies mode, though the development team was not in a giving mood when it came to revealing the mode's details. Given the history of the series' multiplayer, we expect big, big things when the time does come.

Turning Points

When taking all of the new elements of *Double Agent* into consideration, you're immediately left with a feeling that this game is a huge gamble for Ubisoft — and to an extent it is — for a number of reasons. The radical new look and fearless gameplay are at the forefront, with the exclusion of the spies-vs.-mercs mode following not far behind. Also, previous games were always developed at Ubisoft's Montreal studio and ported over to the PS2 by Ubisoft Shanghai. With *Double Agent*, the tables are completely turned as the story and new gameplay elements, as well as the next-gen version, are all the product of the Shanghai studio (this game can be seen as the proving grounds for the up-and-coming studio), while the Montreal team is heading up the current-gen "ports."

Frankly, we like this feeling of uncertainty for the series, but there are safety nets in place to assure, at the very least, a familiar and comforting *Splinter Cell* experience. Outside of the HQ missions, the other levels are essentially the tried-and-true gameplay we've come to love (they're even referred to as "classic" missions inter-



Wheel Just because you're a super spy doesn't mean you can't have fun!

nally), complete with triclops goggles and Michael Ironside's warning tone. Also, roughly a dozen key *Splinter Cell* team members from Montreal have relocated to Shanghai, almost ensuring a high level of quality control.

Splinter Cell: Double Agent is all about duality; the dual lives of Sam Fisher are paralleled by the dichotomy of the gameplay, which are in turn mirrored by the two development studios. But like the previous three titles, the game gives the impression of a very singular and focused vision, and is sure to be one of the last great hurrahs for this generation of games.

KAISER HWANG

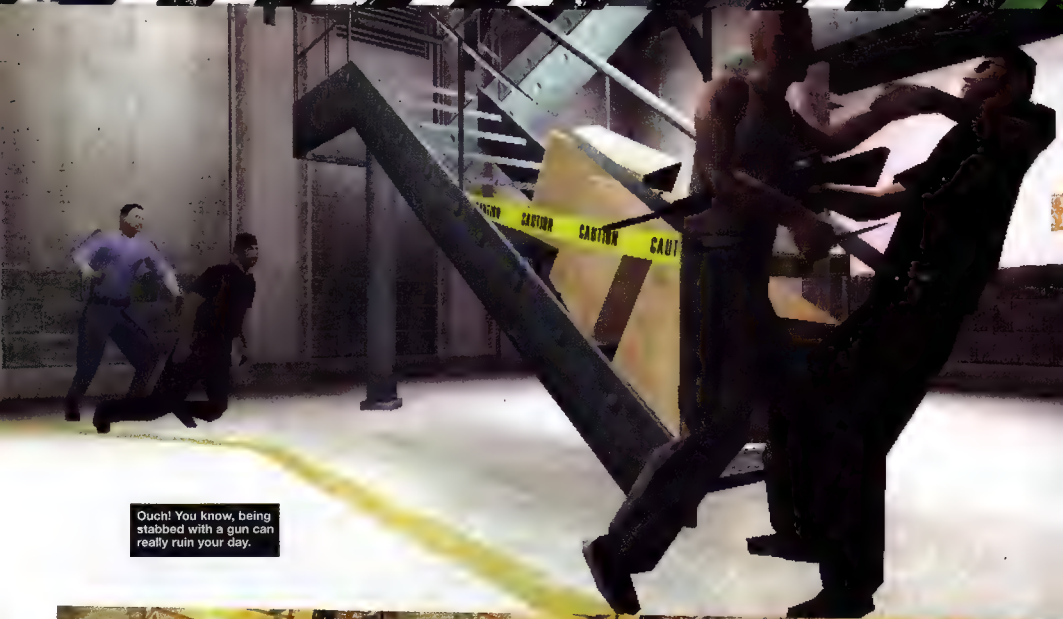
Name: Front Arm Lock **SPY**

SPY vs. SPY Mode	Splinter Cell 4 online
Type: Face to Face move	4-5-6-7-8-9-10
Initiation: Attacker from Front	2-4-B
Resolution: Lethal	

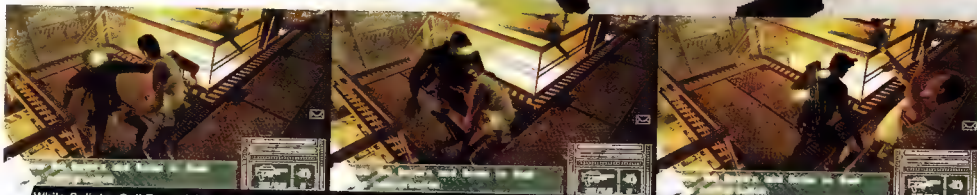
It is a brutal tension releaser after teams hiding situations and rewards the attacker.

Close combat can be launched everywhere easily

About the only thing we know about the new spy-vs.-spy mode is that close combat will pay a much bigger role. Here is a diagram outlining one of the new moves, appropriately called the front arm lock.



Ouch! You know, being stabbed with a gun can really ruin your day.



While *Splinter Cell Essentials* is a PSP game, it still retains everything that makes the series great, from the controls to the graphics to the Sam Fisher.

POKESAM

Splinter Cell Essentials

Redefining stealth action in the portable world

The title is a bit misleading, considering this game is not a "greatest hits" compilation of previous *Splinter Cell* titles. *Essentials* is actually an almost entirely new game, and covers a timeline that starts before the first console game and ends... well, we'll get to that later.

As noted, the first missions start prior to the original *Splinter Cell* in the year 1999, a time when Sam Fisher was still a Navy SEAL. Aside from this purely technical detail, gameplay remains largely unchanged from the rest of the series, though Sam is sans his signature gear and must rely on his environment and found weapons,

such as knives. Over the course of the game's nine missions, and through the use of animated 2D storyboards, you'll learn more about the Sam Fisher character and his personal motivations, as well as some details that tie into the console games. In fact, the oil rig level from the original game and the penthouse level from *Chaos Theory* are two of the game's levels, and fit directly into this condensed history of the lovable Sam Fisher.

In all ways timely, *SC: Essentials* also ties directly into *Double Agent*, giving you bits of background info that further flesh out the story. That's almost the sole purpose of this game — to give you a more complete

worldview of the *Splinter Cell* saga. After playing through it, you'll be aware of details only subtly alluded to in the console games. Likewise, playing through all of the console games will complete the picture for *Essentials*. It's not a completely novel idea, but it's no less effective because of the fact, either.

Running on a tweaked version of the PS2 *Pandora Tomorrow* engine, *Essentials* looks marvelous for a PSP game. The amount of graphical detail that has been preserved is nothing short of amazing, including some fantastic real-time lighting and Sam's complete set of animations. There are a few areas where transparent

SPLINTER CELL ESSENTIALS

PUBLISHED BY
Ubisoft

MADE BY
Ubisoft Montreal

WHAT IS THIS?
Splinter Cell for your pocket.

ESRB RATING
Not yet rated

IT COMES OUT
March

MULTIPLAYER
2-player versus

ONLINE
No

UBISOFT GAMES

textures are used to give the illusion of light rays bursting through slits, but it's convincing enough to not be distracting. Also, the environments are suitably smaller, but it's not a fact that you're ever consciously aware of.

Originating from a console series, our first major concern was how the control scheme would be ported over. We played through a few levels, and we can happily say that the solution is not only playable, but 100% complete and faithful. One of the keys to the ease in control is the way the camera system works: simply holding down the circle button while moving the analog stick will rotate it, while tapping the button will cause it to center behind you. Because most of *Splinter Cell*'s movements are essentially done by moving the camera, this quick access to camera control makes the game play almost as fluidly as the console versions.

Our other major concern was how *Essentials* would take into consideration the PSP platform itself. After all, *Splinter Cell* games are not really tailored for portable play due to the reliance on sound and the somewhat lengthy levels. Clever solutions have been devised for each of these worries, the first being the addition of a two extra sound meters (in addition to the general sound meter) — one for both the left and right sides of Sam. This allows you to see a visual representation of where the directional audio cues are coming from. So, whether you're on a noisy bus or simply need to have the volume turned down, you're in no way crippled by the lack of audio.

As for the level length, each stage has been segmented into eight-minute chunks — the average amount of time per session people are likely to play the game. Either way, you can save anywhere, so there's no loss in any regard. Also, before each mission, you'll notice that the game will load the entire level in the beginning. You'll have to wait a little extra before each mission (though really, the load

The Ties That Bind

So we mentioned that *Essentials* will not only give you a glimpse into Sam's pre-Threat Epsilon days, but also tie together the stories from all four *Splinter Cell* console games. *Double Agent* included. What we didn't mention was that *Essentials* ends with a bang by giving you the first look at *Splinter Cell 5*. No, really, we're not joking in any way.



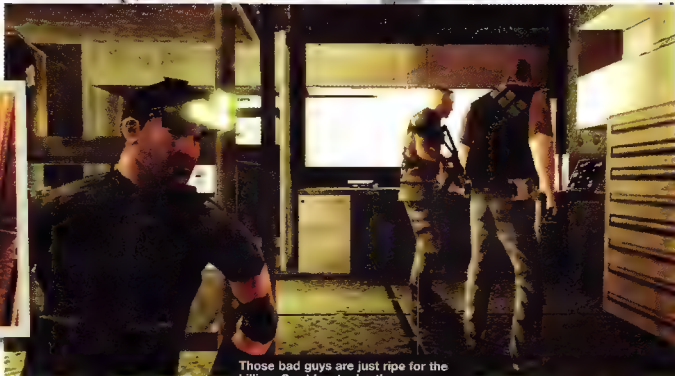
Splinter Cell 5 is already in the works, and the PSP game will lead right into it. All we ask is that Sam keeps his goggles, Michael Ironside be his voice, and that it not have heavy metal music.



Ha! Those fools won't spot Sam behind the cart!



The camera is easy to move, which is very important.



Those bad guys are just ripe for the killing. Or at least a hurting.



This is *Splinter Cell*, so you've got to be as quiet as humanly possible.

is pretty average for a PSP game), the benefit being that there are no mid-level loads. Besides making each level more seamless, the complete level load makes it so the game only needs to stream audio data at given times, improving the battery life. There really isn't much the development team hasn't thought of for Sam's first PSP outing.

In fact, multiplayer has even been included in the game. Forgoing the spies-vs.-mercs game as well as the co-op missions, *Essentials* will contain a version of the new spies-vs.-spies mode found in the console versions

of *Double Agent*. Again, any hard info on the mode has yet to be revealed, though we suspect the use of some very vertical spaces.

You can't help but feel relieved by the amount of detail and thoughtfulness that has gone into making *Essentials* both a proper *Splinter Cell* game and a tailored PSP game. We can't say for certain if it will live up to the standards of its console brethren just yet, but considering the amount of new content in the game and how it ties the series as a whole together, it's likely you'll play it regardless.

KAISER HWANG



Look at the detail! Now remember this is on PSP. Impressive, no?



Remember this train level? Let's hope it makes it in the game as an unlockable.

Unlock the Past

Because *Essentials* runs off a modified version of the *Pandora Tomorrow* engine, what better unlockable could there be than to include levels from *Pandora Tomorrow*? Well, we actually got to play the memorable train level from *Pandora*, though the inclusion of this and possibly other levels as unlockables is entirely dependent on how much time is left after the main game is completed.



Oof! That hurts, but at least that kick wasn't a little lower...



Hmm... Sam may want to try another route. This one looks pretty risky.

It's better to sneak past the bad guys, but sometimes you'll need your guns.



Remember to follow your objectives, or you're going to have to try again.




Do not kill the factory workers.



Dude, Sam's right there! Just look for the cue ball behind that crate!

After the incriminating audio file.



Nova clearly has the concept of "duck" down — now if she could only master the "cover" part.

LOST AND FOUND

StarCraft: Ghost

The most elusive Ghost of all creeps out of the shadows

It's been a long, bumpy road for Blizzard's latest attempt in console gaming, *StarCraft: Ghost*. The game was originally being co-developed by developer Nihilistic Software and Blizzard itself; things moved slowly, but this was Blizzard's first console game in many years, and so the somewhat measured approach to the world of analog sticks and shoulder buttons was not unexpected. After more than two years in development and a series of false starts and extended release dates, however, Blizzard decided to pull the plug, informing legions of hot and bothered *StarCraft* fanboys that the game was put on temporary hold. The company cited "plans to expand and evolve the design of its upcoming tactical-action console game" — what we now know translated to, "we needed a new developer." Suffice it to say, things were not looking rosy for the company that seemed to do no wrong.

Things were touch-and-go until last May's E3, when Blizzard showed the game publicly for the first time. *Ghost* had been handed over to and redesigned by a new developer — Swingin' Ape Studios, whose quirky shooter *Metal Arms: Glitch in the System* won them plenty of critical praise (see boxout).

StarCraft: Ghost is set in Blizzard's celebrated *StarCraft* universe, in which the uber-tech Terrans are locked in a war against the Zerg and the Protoss. You play Nova, who is, as the name might suggest, a "ghost" — a covert, psychic-skilled operative of the Terran military. Equally unsurprisingly, you're armed to the teeth: C-10 canister sniper rifles, cloaking ability, thermal vision mode...



STARCRRAFT: GHOST

PUBLISHED BY
Blizzard

MADE BY
Swingin' Ape
Studios

WHAT IS THIS?
The legendary RTS
franchise goes
third-person

RELEASE
2006

ESRB
Pending

ONLINE
Yes

MULTIPLAYER
8-player versus

AGAINST ALL ENEMIES

Since *Overwatch*’s release, it’s clear that Blizzard’s opinion that multiplayer modes would not be included due to a “fundamental” lack of the single-player aspects of the game was a somewhat puzzling decision. It only makes sense if Blizzard has made a name for itself based largely on its past understanding of multiplayer game design. Perhaps the best example is, in fact, the original *StarCraft*, which remains one of the most popular games on the planet, nearly eight years after its release. (The game’s popularity in South Korea is the story, with professionally-recognized tournaments, professional players, and hugely popular televised competitions.)

Well, amidst the changes, Blizzard sobered up and multiplayer is now part of the package. *StarCraft: Ghost* will support up to eight simultaneous players online, as well as different character classes and vehicles from the single-player game. As it’s an action game inspired by a real-time strategy game, many of the RTS elements have been worked into the multiplayer. You’ll get to do stuff like take control of buildings and use vehicles to overpower your enemies, looking at the larger landscape rather than just what’s in front of your gun.

We’ve been assured that the multiplayer maps will be populated by more than just angry storage drums.

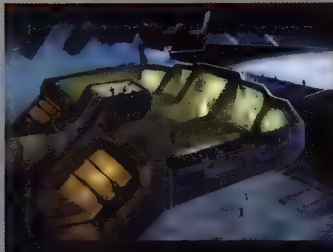


and that’s just the tip of the iceberg. Think of Nova as a futuristic Sam Fisher, sans five o’clock shadow.

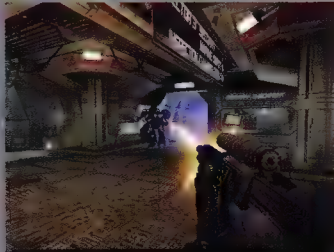
One of the first things you’ll notice is the game’s over-the-shoulder targeting system, which is very reminiscent of that found in *Resident Evil 4* (in fact, this seems to be becoming the action game perspective du jour). Essentially, when you hold up a weapon, the perspective zooms and tightens; put your weapon away, and the camera reverts back to a standard third-person perspective. While it’s still a bit difficult and sluggish, we’ve been assured that this is being tweaked — and there’s plenty of time for that.

Essentially a combination of action and stealth gameplay, *Ghost* attempts to make both options equally viable. While particular missions lend themselves to specific approaches, the game won’t punish you for choosing one over the other. The demo we played incorporated a little of both sides; the action stage took place on the Terrazine Refinery on Mars Sara, where an explosion has leveled the facility. The refinery is brimming with enemies, all of which were of the mutated, bite-your-damn-face-off variety. It served as a good place to try out some of Nova’s weapons, including rocket launchers, flamethrowers, and other boomsticks of various shapes and sizes.

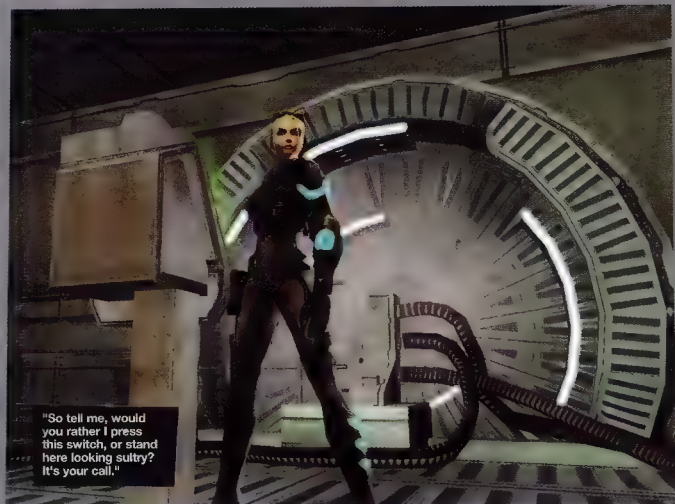
Perhaps more interesting, however, are Nova’s stealth techniques. An assortment of stealth kills are at your disposal — especially cathartic was jumping on the shoulders of a marine twice our size, opening his



In the future, people take their command bridges very seriously. Looks like MC Escher did this one.



The aiming system, which pulls the camera in for firing, helps get a bead on distant enemies.



"So tell me, would you rather I press this switch, or stand here looking sultry? It's your call."

helmet, throwing a grenade down his suit, and sealing it shut. It's not all physical — Nova's psychic powers allow her to cloak (think Predator), as well as choke enemies (think Vader). The latter takes place in a mini-game where, in typical Blizzard fashion, each enemy class requires a different button combination to kill. There's also the enemy *Matrix*-style bullet time, which will be sure to please fans of slow motion.

StarCraft: Ghost is, once again, starting to take shape and regain some of the momentum it lost. There's plenty still to work out — quite a bit of graphical funkiness, for one, and a lack of precise aiming for another — but with a release date well into 2006, there's also plenty of time to work out these kinks. The series' fans will surely be the game's biggest critics. Fortunately, Blizzard's commitment to making the game the right way seems to be proving worthwhile. We all know we'll be playing *World of StarCraft* on our PlayStation 3 (or 4... or 5...) someday, so here's to the series maintaining its integrity in the meantime. **EVAN SHAMON**

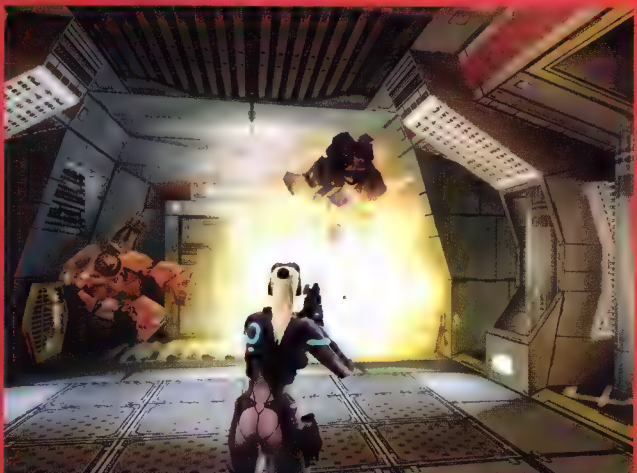
The variety of inventive kill animations is very impressive.



ARMS OF STEEL

One of the more overlooked games of the past several years, *Swingin' Ace* (2003 title *Metal Arms: Glitch in the System*) is a game with soul. While it looks, on the surface, like *Halo* for lots of on-foot players — you play as a strappy, wisecracking robot covered head-to-toe in a ridiculous yellow paint and a trademark for blasting — the game proves to be a triumph of solid mechanics and thoughtful

gameplay. The tactics and gameplay are extremely solid and smart, borrowing what it counts from the aforementioned *Halo*. The real draw is the ability to sneak up on robotic enemies and hack into their on-board data banks, not to mention the inclusion of an electronic lock-down; however, this actually allows the player to take control of said robots, thus turning them into your own multi-player battles, and it only makes sense that Blizzard wants to know what they've learned. *Reviewed by Stuart West*



One good shot will send enemies flying through the air like action figures strapped to firecrackers.



These enemies can see right through Nova. No, seriously, she's cloaked.



The starship designs are fanciful. This one looks like it's home to a sports stadium.



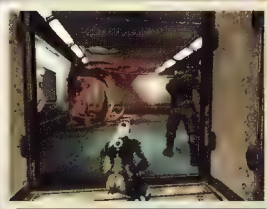
The aliens like to set up shop on a planet by spreading disgusting field across it.



The outdoor environments promise to be more than bleak moonscapes.



The mechanical design in the game is extremely faithful to the *StarCraft* style.



Maybe if Nova just waits around, this guy will walk into the wall's, er, mouth?

When she's not sneaking around enemy installations, Nova likes to visit Old Faithful. Which, in the future, proves that the environmentalists were right after all.

Spell effects are typically extravagant, and every character has at least a little magic.

FINAL FANTASY XII

PUBLISHED BY
Square Enix

MADE BY
Square Enix

WHAT IS THIS?
The long-awaited new installment of *Final Fantasy*

ESRB RATING
Pending

IT COMES OUT
Spring

MULTIPLAYER
None

ONLINE
None

NEARLY FINAL

Final Fantasy XII

We played it for an hour and have the diary to prove it

00:05:07 The game starts with a great trailer, but let's talk gameplay.

The first area, the Phon Coast, is a sunny beach upon which lead character Vaan leads blonde cutie Penelo and the mysterious soldier Basch on a mission to kill something called a rockeater.

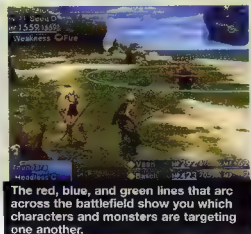
Apparently, you attract the rockeater's attention by killing armored horse-like creatures called sleipnir... which is fine, 'cause I'm planning to jack up each and every living creature I come across.

00:08:16

I see now why this level is described as having a "Wait mode" battle system — the action freezes any time I open the action menu. From there, I can tell any of my three characters to use an item, attack an enemy, or cast a magic spell. Once I select an action, a meter next to the character's name begins to fill; when it's full, the action is carried out. Simple enough.

It's a very similar system to *Final Fantasy XI*, with the big differences being that this game is one player only, and *FFXI* didn't freeze when you opened

up the action menu or show the player the actual charge meter — that was all being done behind the scenes.



The red, blue, and green lines that arc across the battlefield show you which characters and monsters are targeting one another.

00:15:07

So far, I've laid a beatdown upon two piranhas, one sleipnir, a couple of big muscular dudes with no heads, countless mandragora, and numerous seeps, a sort of funny-looking species. Thankfully, I can see the enemies from a distance, so no more random surprise battles.

00:16:03

The manual explains that the big, diamond-shaped G next to each char-

acter's name is for "Gambit," which is the autopilot feature. In the final version, you'll be able to tell characters to be aggressive, heal you, and other similar commands. But in this demo, it's just "on" or "off." I choose "on," hoping Penelo will keep healing me during battle.

Basch seems like a tank, but everyone wields at least a little magic. There appear to be four main types: white heals, black attacks, and time and green magic create status effects like Slow or Protect.

Oddly though, there are no character-specific skills in the menu, and I can't figure out how to summon Espers yet.



Belias prepares to lay some serious smack down.



The graphics really raise the bar for this series. Just look at these bombs, and the way they light the characters.



You'll encounter a wide variety of monsters on your travels — including some T-Rexes, apparently.

00:21:15

Uh-oh. Apparently, "rockeater" is the game's name for "bloodthirsty Tyrannosaurus." Go figure...

00:22:40

A-ha! With a full magic meter, I'm able to summon a giant, vaguely Native American-looking Esper named Hashmal, who takes the place of the other two characters. Mr. Rex went down quite quickly once Hashmal got in there. Looks like that's the end of this chapter.

00:24:04

Round two finds princess Ashe leading puffy-shirt pirate Balthier and rabbit-babe Fran into a dungeon called The Stilshrine of Miriam. Our goal: to kill the "Ring Wyrm." Problem is, we need the key to its room, which is guarded by an adamantoise. This is Active battle mode, so the fight continues even when I'm wading around in the menu. Let's boogie.

00:31:05

Wow. The design of these glowing fireball enemies called bombs is stunning — they look incredible. Actually,

everything looks pretty fantastic. Its level of detail is definitely above previous FF games, though obviously not quite "next-gen" quality.

00:33:18

Note to self: when you see a floating enemy with a kind of goat-horned skull head and giant claws, that's a gazer. They're tough to kill if they happen to cast Disable on your entire party.

00:45:28

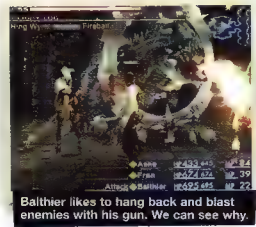
This dungeon is sort of maze-like, with stairs connecting to different levels. I eventually find the adamantoise, more or less a turtle the size of a house. It wasn't too tough for these demo-level-advanced characters, but this could change in the final version

opened, and a huge dragon with a ring around its neck was revealed. We started pounding on each other, and then I summoned another Esper — this time a sort of spear-carrying monkey fellow named Belias — and sat back to watch the fireworks.

Belias ended the battle with an amazing special attack that involved him twirling his spear and somehow causing a huge fireball to descend from the heavens that engulfed the enemy in a fire-storm.

The playable demo ended, and another trailer started rolling, hinting at more of the game's mysterious storyline. My next visit to Ivalice can't come quickly enough.

ERIC BRATCHER



00:58:05

I know, I should have gone to the Dragon Door by now, but I keep just wandering around killing bombs. I can't get over how cool they look, but my hour is almost up. Let's go kill the Ring Wyrm.

00: 61:54

Okay, that was awesome! The door

INTRODUCTIONS



Dramatis personae

So you still want to know what the trailer's all about, eh? Well, here's a basic summary: the trailer introduces all of Final Fantasy XIII's central characters, with a one-sentence description that explains what their deal is. It's pretty neat, actually.

The game looks as good as *Gran Turismo 4*. There's even a photo mode!

GRAN MOTORCYCLISMO

Tourist Trophy: The Real Riding Sim

The makers of *Gran Turismo* get up on two wheels

We all know Polyphony Digital as the makers of the PS2's most realistic car simulator, *Gran Turismo*, but after four iterations of the real driving simulator, the developers have decided to tackle to a mostly untapped racing subgenre: motorcycles. Sure, there have been motorcycle games in the past — Namco's excellent *MotoGP* series, for instance — but few have had the intense focus on accurately recreating the real-life experience of riding a motorcycle. Enter *Tourist Trophy*, a game that sets out to do just that, and also hopefully spark people's interest in the sport of bike racing.

If history has shown us anything, it's that the general public doesn't care enough to play a game whose sole focus is on motorcycles. Sure, people enjoy riding them in the exaggerated worlds of games like *GTA*, but most gamers lean towards the familiar and more accessible world of car racing. In its favor, if any game can pique people's interest, it's *Tourist Trophy*. For one, it feels exactly like *Gran Turismo*. Let's not forget that *Gran Turismo* is one of the few mainstream games that appeals to both hardcore gearheads

and more general racing fans. While it's never really been a pick-up-and-play series, there was a good balance of accessibility and tuning minutiae in the early games. *Tourist Trophy* fills the same mold, with less of an emphasis on tuning your bikes and more on just easing you into the whole world of motorcycle racing. There's still enough tuning and racer customization for

those seeking such features, though.

As in *Gran Turismo*, the stars of the game are the vehicles, in this case the wide array of accurately modeled Japanese and European bikes. Plus, just like in *GT*, all the engine sounds have been recorded from the real thing, so your bikes sound exactly as they should. Further enhancing the level of realism and immersion is a

TOURIST TROPHY: THE REAL RIDING SIMULATOR

PUBLISHED BY
Sony CEA

MADE BY
Polyphony Digital

WHAT IS THIS?
Gran Turismo with motorcycles instead of cars

RELEASE
Spring

ESRB
Pending

ONLINE
No



Leaning and braking are the two most important things to remember when heading into a turn.

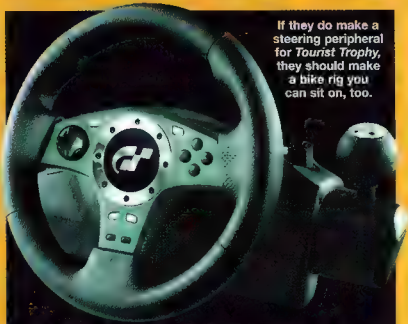
new first-person cockpit view where you genuinely feel like you're behind the handlebars of a motorcycle. The gauges on the dash are all impeccably modeled and display accurate information as you race — always a nice touch.

Many of the game's 35 tracks are lifted straight from *GT*, though they've been modified to better suit motorcycle racing — a practice exercised even in real life. During our hands-on, we raced around the familiar Laguna Seca track, and we can testify to the noticeable change in gameplay. In short, we felt much more cautious, slowing down before turns and trying to lean properly, lest we lose control and get some serious road rash. On that note, some of the spill animations look fantastically painful, but don't expect any real damage modeling on the bikes.

Admittedly, the learning curve is steep — as was evidenced by our numerous crashes — but it didn't take too long to maintain control of the

slower class bikes. Unfortunately, we didn't get any hands-on time with the high-powered bikes, but we did see them in action — boy, do they pack a wallop. They have so much power that you have to struggle to constantly keep them from popping wheelies, but by the time you've unlocked these beasts, you should be master motorcyclists, right?

License tests are also borrowed from *GT*, but in *TT* they're designed to be more of an aid to ease people into the whole concept of motorcycle racing. You can also jump straight into the Arcade mode if you want to forgo all the testing hoopla, or check out the two-player splitscreen versus mode if you're looking for some multiplayer action. One feature we're not glad the game shares with *GT* is the lack of online play. But hey, that hasn't stopped the *GT* series from maintaining its hold on the car tuner crown, and we doubt it'll stop *TT* either. **JUSTIN COBING**



If they do make a steering peripheral for *Tourist Trophy*, they should make a bike rig you can sit on, too.

It's all about control!

One of the best accessories for *GT4* is the Logitech Driving Force Pro steering wheel. It's one of the best wheels ever made and, combined with *GT4*, is pretty much the best at-home solution you can get when trying to recreate a true driving experience. Can we expect to see a similar accessory for *Tourist Trophy*? Probably not, but remember that stranger things have happened.



You can also choose from three different riding styles to suit your motorcycling needs.

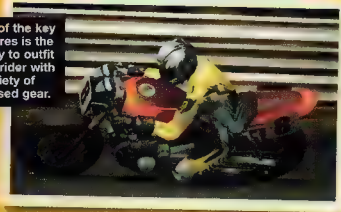
Gained in translation

Like *GT*, there are going to be some changes when *Tourist Trophy* hits the States. For instance, the music is going to be altered to suit the American audience's tastes, but an exciting possible — with a heavy emphasis on "possible" — addition is the inclusion of some American choppers. There will be no Harley-Davidsons, and most likely no Orange County Choppers (since they have their own games) either, but there just might be... something.

European and Japanese bikes are cool and all, but we would like the option to ride around on a chopper.



One of the key features is the ability to outfit your rider with a variety of licensed gear.



You can tune the bikes a bit, but Polyphony wanted to keep it simpler to make the game accessible to everyone.

Yes, the license tests are back. Are they any easier? We can only hope.



A lot of the tracks should be familiar to *GT* fans, though there have been a few tweaks.



With the strength of many men and a fancy red scarf, Mr. Esc will save the day.

SORTIE

PSP

Exit

Taito makes a big entrance on PSP

EXIT

PUBLISHED BY
Ubisoft

MADE BY
Taito

WHAT IS THIS?
2D puzzle-solving
and platforming.

ESRB RATING
Pending

IT COMES OUT
February

MULTIPLAYER
No

ONLINE
Nope

Ubisoft and Taito's newest PSP venture might come as something of a change of pace for owners of Sony's high-end handheld. For one thing, its graphics are in two dimensions, as opposed to the myriad 3D games already flooding the PSP market. It's also not a franchise title, nor is it a port of a similarly-themed PS2 game, nor does it involve racing adorably big-headed characters in cute (but oh so dangerous!) miniature vehicles. In other words, *Exit* takes a decidedly old-school approach on a decidedly new-school platform.

The premise is intriguing, even

timely: players take control of Mr. Esc, a "professional rescuer who can rescue people from just about any situation," to quote directly from the game's makers. In a year where Mother Nature seems to be punching back (the record 27th hurricane of 2005 was just named), the game has you making your way through various precarious situations in order to rescue your friends from life-threatening situations. You'll brave fires, earthquakes, and other disasters, solving puzzles and enlisting the help of your rescued victims in the process.

The demonstration level we're



Once again, the pickaxe comes in handy to make it through this very chilly building.



The graphics look like a cross between *Viewtiful Joe* and *Rolling Thunder*.



Fear not: This platformer is replete with boxes to shove around.

privy to concerned much of itself with pushing and pulling crates into positions that allowed us to reach otherwise inaccessible areas, finding switches to open doors, and a whole bunch of running and jumping. After finding a survivor, we were able to give him simple instructions such as to follow, stay still, or interact with particular objects. At one point, for example, we needed the survivor to stand on a door switch while we went inside the room to collect an item. There are shades of both *Abe's Oddysee* and *Chip's Challenge* (Atari Lynx) in the game, and for fans of puzzle games, that's a good thing.

All of this is wrapped in an impressive graphical package that immediately recalls *Viewtiful Joe*, with super-stylized 3D character models layered atop colorful 2D backgrounds. It's hectic, it's brainy, and it may just be exactly what PSP needs to break out of its current slump. **EVAN SHAMOON**

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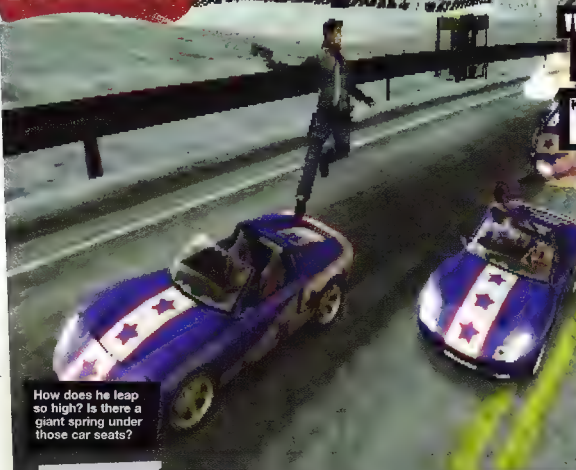
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How does he leap so high? Is there a giant spring under those car seats?

"WE'LL ALL BE IN FOR A HUGE TREAT"



Maybe if you're really quiet, they won't notice you hanging on the back of their jeep.

PURSUIT FORCE

PUBLISHED BY Sony CEA

MADE BY BigBig Studios/ SOE

WHAT IS THIS? An exciting new arcade action title for the PSP.

ESRB RATING Teen

IT COMES OUT March

MULTIPLAYER No

ONLINE No

LUCKY AND WILD

Pursuit Force



Driving, shooting, and jacking cars... Sound familiar? Well, this is something different

Now that *GTA*'s come and gone, what else can we look forward to on PSP? If it's games you want, not a whole lot, unfortunately; but there is a beacon in the darkness, and its name is *Pursuit Force*. The game is the answer to our most-asked prayer — the one wishing for more original titles on the PSP... and not just original titles, but *quality* original titles.

The story setup involves five gangs located throughout the city that need to be brought to justice. That's where you, a member of a new *Pursuit Force* unit, come in. End of story. Obviously, this game isn't about being an epic narrative that will stand the test of time — it's about crazy action, which it delivers in spades.

Most of the game takes place behind the wheel. The mission we played had us chasing after trucks filled with a toxic gas, with the objective being to catch up to them and take them down. No, this isn't a car combat game like *Twisted Metal* or anything like that (though you can shoot from your car if you're so inclined). Rather, it's all about carjacking. We're not talking about *Grand Theft Auto*-style carjacking, but carjacking while speeding down a freeway.

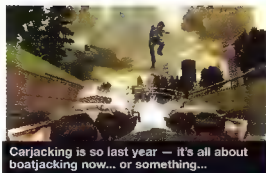
The gameplay is actually very simple: once you're in range and see the proper icon pop up, you press a button to leap from your car into the baddies' car. You then try to shoot them while dodging their attacks,

eventually taking control of their vehicle. Now imagine doing this not just once, but *all the time*, leaping and shooting and jacking cars — and even boats! — while driving really, really fast. It's all very Hollywood and not nearly as repetitious as it sounds.

Even with our brief taste of *Pursuit Force*, we were instantly hooked. If the rest of the game can maintain the same level of adrenaline, we'll all be in for a huge treat. **JUSTIN CHENG**



There may come a time when you'll want to trade up from two wheels to four...



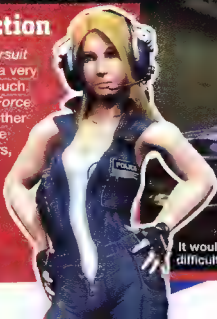
Carjacking is so last year — it's all about boatjacking now... or something...

WHO'S GOT GAME?

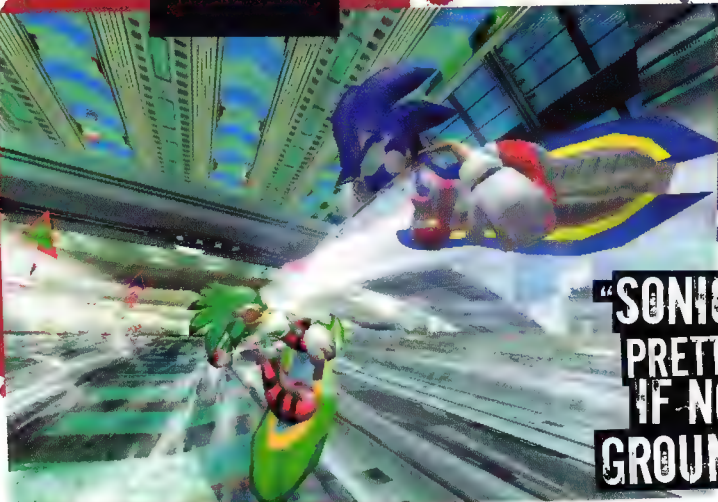
Tuned to perfection

The U.K. version of *Pursuit Force* is supposedly a very punishing game. As such, the U.S. version of *Pursuit Force* will have checkpoints and other difficulty tweaks to make the game playable for all gamers, not just the hardcore.

Wait, does that mean U.K. gamers are better than we are? No, that couldn't be the case... right? Noooo!



It would be cool if they had an option to play on the original difficulty, so players could really feel the difference.



"SONIC RIDERS SEEMS PRETTY SOLID AS IS, IF NOT ENTIRELY GROUNDBREAKING"

AKA SSX: SONIC SUPERCROSS

Sonic Riders

Sonic and friends gear up for racing action

SONIC RIDERS

PUBLISHED BY
Sega

MADE BY
Sonic Team

WHAT IS THIS?

A Sonic racer with hoverboards!

ESRB RATING
Everyone

IT COMES OUT
February

MULTIPLAYER
4-player versus

ONLINE
No

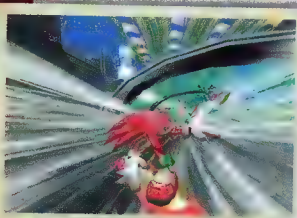
This green bird, Jet, is Sonic's rival. Apparently, he likes to grind.

Sonic may be many things, but above all else, he's fast. Fittingly, almost every *Sonic* game emphasizes the blue hedgehog's incredible speed. While it would be easy for Sonic Team to simply drop the multitude of *Sonic* characters onto a couple of generic courses and call it a racing game, there's fortunately more to *Sonic Riders* than just that.

Oh, don't get us wrong — it's still about speed. *Sonic Riders* moves at an impressive clip (as any deserving *Sonic* game should), but there's a twist: hoverboards. Like Marty McFly, Sonic et al. get a taste of the Dew-drenched extreme future.

After playing a bit, you'll unlock several boards to choose from, each one affecting your rider's stats. More importantly, the boards give your character the opportunity to pull off tricks during races, which spices up the gameplay and makes the game a little deeper than "get to the end."

See, the key to the racing is your Air meter — run out of Air, and you'll be left carrying your board and running the race on foot to the nearest pit stop. As such, you'll want to keep your Air full as much as possible by going to the aforementioned pit stops, grabbing rings, and pulling off tricks. The tricks, in particular, are your best bet, and are accomplished by tilting the analog stick right as you begin a jump. Once you land — assuming you



Jump in somebody's wake and do some tricks to get more boost.



Sonic R is kind of like *Sonic Riders*, except without the hoverboards, sense of speed, and current-gen graphics.

Sonic R: the other Sonic racing game

Before there was *Sonic Riders*, there was *Sonic R* (originally for the Sega Saturn and PC, and more recently on the GameCube as part of the Sonic Gems Collection). It was a pretty fun game at the time, but we're curious if it would still hold up today. If only we could find our copies of the game...

haven't landed on your head — you'll get a grade and a refill on some Air.

There are also some half-pipe opportunities to exploit, too. Well, there aren't half-pipes in the traditional sense, but rather air wakes left behind by other players as they race ahead; you can jump into these wakes and use them to speed up and do half-pipe tricks. All in all, *Sonic Riders* seems pretty solid as is, if not entirely groundbreaking. Check back for a full review and our final verdict on this clever offshoot. **JUSTIN CHENG**

The Wide World of Sports

The couch potato workout!

It's that time of the year again, folks. Yes, the yearly updates of your favorite sports games are just around the corner, from the face-breaking realism of EA's *Fight Night* to the most addictive soccer game in town, Konami's *Winning Eleven*. Here's

a look at the cream of the soon-to-be-released crop. So, if round balls, pigskin, or, well, good old fashioned punches to the face are your thing, there's almost definitely something in store for you on the PS2. **EVAN SHAMOON**

Fight Night Round 3

FIGHT NIGHT
ROUND 3

PUBLISHED BY
EA

MADE BY
EA Chicago

IT COMES OUT
February - PS2/
PSP, TBA PS3

When EA showed *Fight Night Round 3* at the PlayStation 3 unveiling at E3 2005 (that's a lot of threes, isn't it?), it was perhaps the most impressive game of the lot. Not because it was the most graphically intensive — that honor went to Guerilla Games' *Killzone* — but because it showed off the most realistic-looking characters we've ever seen in a video-game... by far. That, and the fact that it was actually playing in real time; the game's producer was playing the demo with a PS2 controller in front of our very eyes.

While we weren't privy to the PS3 version of the game, we did get a hands-on with the Xbox 360 version recently, which the developers say will be an extremely close match. One noteworthy thing in the next-gen version of the game is the lack of a HUD. Basically, all of the information you need (stamina, injuries, etc.) can be gleaned from simply looking at your character — a testament to how well EA Chicago is modeling the human face and body.

The gameplay is undergoing only subtle refinements for the PS3, but the real star here is the graphics. Watch that face ripple!

One of the big new additions this year (in all versions of the game) is something EA is calling "Impact Punches." Essentially, if you land a perfectly timed Flash KO, or jump into a quick mid-fight mini-game to land a humiliating knockdown punch, you can change the whole momentum of the fight in a heartbeat. It's a seemingly small addition, but one that adds more weight to the proceedings — there's no spacing out this time around, or else you're gonna find yourself facedown on the mat.

HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPION

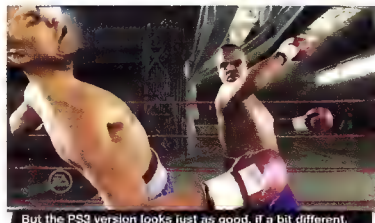
Our recent hands-on with the Xbox 360 version was surprising in that it looked easily as good, if not even better than the PS3 version shown at E3 — further proof that EA's Chicago studio is doing some impressive stuff with next-gen hardware. A side-by-side comparison of the two games shows better lighting effects and contrast on the Xbox 360 version, while the PS3 version seems to capture the facial subtleties a bit better. Time will tell which version ends up wearing the belt. Get ready for this to be one of the first next-gen benchmarks referred to by Xbox 360 and PS3 evangelists alike.



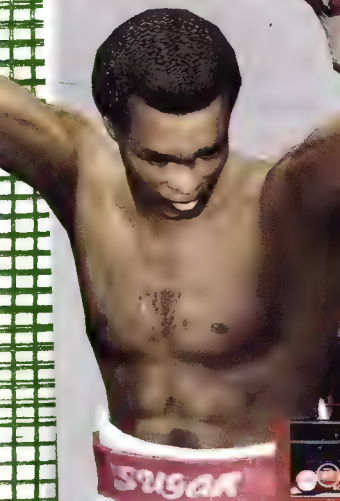
Even on the PS2, the game looks incredible and plays just as well.



Okay, we'll admit that the Xbox 360 version looks good...



But the PS3 version looks just as good, if a bit different.



KEEP THOSE HANDS UP

We were also privy to some *Fight Night* goodness on PS3, which is shaping up nicely. While it obviously pales in comparison to its next-gen cousin, it fares quite favorably best as the PS2 version in terms of graphics. What about the lack of a second analog stick (read: arm)? Actually, for the PSP game, your arms are mapped to two face buttons, while you use the analog stick to move around the ring. It's a bit more arcade-like, but slightly better because of it.

World Soccer Winning Eleven 9 International

For all you FIFA-haters waiting for your next fix of Konami's *Winning Eleven* series, here's the good news: you won't be waiting much longer. The ninth installment of the game is on its way and, fortunately (or not, depending on your perspective), it has some features that may give you reason to part with yet another hard-earned \$50.

Thanks to many hours spent in motion capture sessions, *Winning Eleven 9* sports some nice new ani-

mations to more closely imitate the moves and looks of the players. In addition to the soaking rain and blistering heat, there's also a new weather condition to compete in: snow. Think HoHo, but with a lot more corner kicks.

Winning Eleven's Master League mode has been tweaked, as well. A new training system adds more depth, while the ability to more specifically develop players gives you managerial types more ways to build your team

for success.

The biggest improvement of all is that the latest serving of *WE* finally lets you play online. The full roster of Master League teams will be available, and players can set up tournaments or simply play head-to-head. Commence chomping at the bit.

WORLD SOCCER
WINNING ELEVEN
9 INTERNATIONAL

MADE BY
Konami

IT COMES OUT
February

One thing we really love in the PSP game are the bigger character models.



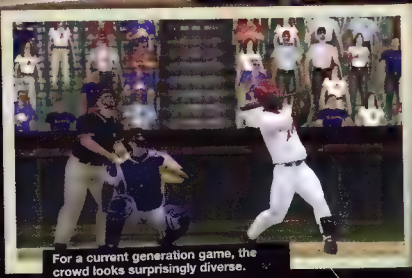
The widescreen format is the only telling feature of the inset PSP shot.

IS THAT AN ELEVEN IN YOUR POCKET?

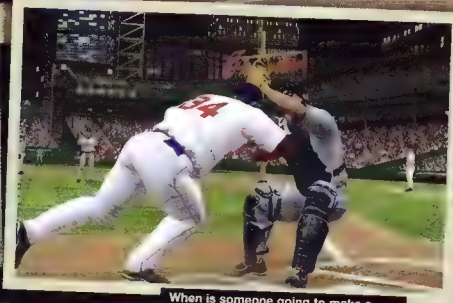
WE9 will also represent the series' first appearance on PSP, and from what we've played, it's been worth the wait. The game's graphics are an impressive match of the PS2 version, with big players and smooth animations. It won't be online, but it will support

ad hoc wireless multiplayer for up to two players. The game is also capable of hooking up with the PS2 version of *Winning Eleven 9* — meaning you'll be able to create the team of your dreams on PS2, coach it to success, and then take it with you on the road. Sweet.

Never, ever underestimate the power of having the official MLB license.



For a current generation game, the crowd looks surprisingly diverse.



When is someone going to make a wrestling beat'em-up baseball game?

MLB '06: The Show

After an excellent showing in 2005, 989 Studios is looking to recapture the glory in the Year of the Dog. Aside from improved pitcher/batter AI, much effort is being put into capturing the feel of real baseball.

Rivalry mode, for example, allows users to go head-to-head and track their settings and stats. Let's say you and your buddy consistently play against each other using the same teams. This mode enables you to keep track of various game stats over time, both online and offline, and will log everything from who hit the most home runs to what player on your team has the most hits.

Perhaps the most impressive new feature, however, is Game-Time Decisions. Players might have personal problems, or your starting pitcher might have a blister on his hand; you then have to decide whether to start him, pull someone out of the bullpen, or bring up a player from the

minors. If you start him, the blister might get worse after four innings, and you might be out of a pitcher for the next week or two. It's a great concept, and we can't wait to see if they can pull it off.

It's not all about mimicking reality, however. King of the Diamond mode has pitcher and batter squaring off against the clock in an arcade-style game where the outfield is littered with targets — making it feel more *Mario* than *MLB*. It's a two-player mode both on and offline, and you can also play one-player in a ladder mode where you're competing against different levels of talent. Other additions include the ability to communicate between the PS2 and PSP versions of the game using chat and IM, as well as personalized walk-up, wind-up, and batting animations for nearly every player. In a sport whose videogame crown is still up for grabs, 989 may just be the team to beat in '06.

**MLB '06:
THE SHOW**
PUBLISHED BY
SCEA
MADE BY
989 Studios
IT COMES OUT
March 2006

Arena Football

ARENA FOOTBALL

PUBLISHED BY EA

MADE BY EA Tiburon

IT COMES OUT February 2006

Less than a month after making headlines for purchasing the exclusive rights to the NFL teams, players, and stadiums, EA announced an exclusive agreement to develop an Arena Football League game. Now, some ten months later, we're seeing the results:

Like the real sport, *Arena Football* is significantly more over-the-top than the NFL. Gameplay is fast — not quite as fast as something like *NFL Street*, but close (the developers say it's about 25% faster than *Madden*). For those new to the sport, it's essentially football stripped down to its core: a 50-yard field contained by padded walls rather than sidelines, and eight-on-eight matches that have athletes playing both offense and defense.

Passing rules the day in *Arena Football*, and that's aptly reflected in the game. Coming from the house that brought you *Madden*, passing feels unsurprisingly very similar — you can still lead your receiver with proper control of the right analog stick, for example. It's noticeably more run-and-gun, however, and the ability to play as the wide receiver

and still have the quarterback throw to any receiver on the field — not just the one you control — mixes things up nicely. On defense, one thing that stands out is the ability to late-hit players. It's all part of the game's attempt to be a more "hardcore" sport than the NFL, and while it's probably going to get you a penalty, it's also undeniably fun. The on-field trash-talking only further drives the point home.

With a franchise mode feature, full online play, an authentic roster (complete with downloadable roster updates), and a host of unlockable classic teams, *Arena Football* looks to be just as authentic as EA's other big guns. With the NFL, the NCAA, the Street, and now the AFL covered, EA's gridiron dominance doesn't appear to be ending anytime soon.



It may look like regular football, but it plays a lot more like *Blitz* to us.

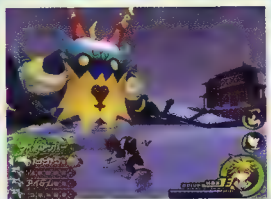


Playing on a shorter field doesn't make you any less of a football player.

Kingdom Hearts II

The one game that we get asked about more than any other is *Kingdom Hearts II* — readers just can't seem to get enough of all the Disney and Square Enix goodness! Unfortunately, we haven't really learned any new info. Let's see... the biggest news is that there's a new world to explore that should make older geeks weep tears of joy — a world based on the movie *Tron!* Sweet! Oh, and some new Disney characters will make guest appearances, too, including Chicken Little (though we're not entirely sure if that's a good thing). We already said *Tron*, right?

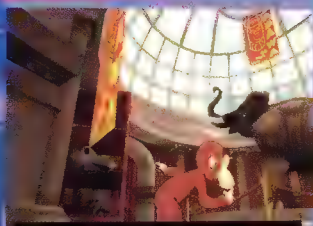
PUBLISHED BY Square Enix + MADE BY Square Enix/Buena Vista + IT COMES OUT March



Hey, don't be scared! It's not like that dragon's going to eat you or anything... It doesn't even have a mouth!



When soldiers in ancient China needed to ease their tension during times of war, they had ducks jump on their backs.

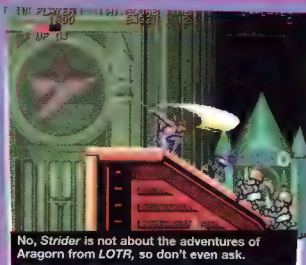


Monkeys are cool. Curious George is a monkey. Therefore, Curious George is cool...

Curious George

You may be curious as to what this *Curious George* game is all about. Well, we have the answers. First, this game is not based on the book at all, but rather the upcoming animated movie. Second, this game is a platformer with a heavy emphasis on exploration. You'll guide George through 12 different levels, finding and collecting a variety of widgets along the way. It's pretty standard stuff, but, well, it's a kids' game... what more do you want?

PUBLISHED BY Nintendo + MADE BY Monkey Bar Games + IT COMES OUT February



No, *Strider* is not about the adventures of Aragorn from *LOTR*, so don't even ask.

Capcom Classics Collection Remix

Okay, we know what you're thinking, but this is *not* a port of the PS2 title. This collection has some entirely different games, folks! Games like *Magic Sword*, *Avengers*, *Three Wonders*, *1941*, *Captain Commando*, *Quiz and Dragons*, *Varth*, *Block Block*, *Street Fighter*, and *Strider*. Okay, so you probably haven't heard of a lot of these, but there are some real gems here. We're most excited about *Strider*, of course, but hey, playing the original *Street Fighter* again is cool, too.

PUBLISHED BY Capcom + MADE BY Digital Eclipse + IT COMES OUT March



Does a Strike Force always have only three guys in it?

Commandos Strike Force

Yes, it's another WWII game... but with a twist: three selectable characters, swappable on the fly! There's the Green Beret who uses machine guns. There's the spy that's all about stealth. There's the sniper, who's all about... um, sniping. You know... with a rifle. These three are the key to overthrowing America's enemies — they're the Three Musketeers of WWII!

PUBLISHED BY Eidos + MADE BY Pyro + IT COMES OUT TBA

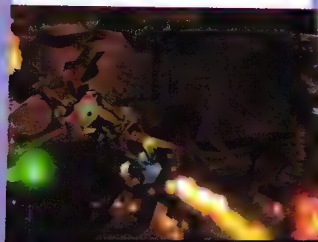
Phantasy Star Universe

Remember how great it was to wile the days away playing *Phantasy Star Online* on Dreamcast (or PC or GameCube or Xbox)? No? Well, it was great. Too bad you missed the party. At least Sega's giving you another chance to get in on the online RPG action with the release of *Phantasy Star Universe*, so don't miss out this time around, 'kay? But what if you hate other people and would rather play alone? Well, you can do that, too, in the game's 40-hour offline single-player mode, but really, you should try to make some friends. Seriously. We're worried about you.

PUBLISHED BY Sega + MADE BY Sonic Team
+ IT COMES OUT May



Whoa, that's one big bad guy! See? This is why you need to bring some backup!



Um, Dax, if you want that plant to grow, you probably shouldn't use fire...

Daxter

Have you ever wondered what happened between *Jak and Daxter* and *Jak III*? Well, wonder no more. Daxter takes center stage as he tries to rescue his best bud in Haven City. Like Jak, Daxter's well-armed... with a fly swatter and a bug spray gun. Not exactly heavy artillery, but he's a metalbug exterminator — what else would he use? The game also features connectivity with *Jak X* to unlock special goodies...

PUBLISHED BY Sony CE + MADE BY Ready at Dawn + IT COMES OUT February



"Chaos" is right when you've got 30 of your soldiers fighting against 30 enemies.

Generation of Chaos

This PSP version of *Generation of Chaos* is actually a port of the fourth game in the series, but it's the first to hit the States. *GoC* is a strategy RPG that works on a larger scale than most of its competition; you're actually responsible for the well-being of an entire kingdom over the span of several years, and the battles are truly massive, with up to 60 soldiers fighting at once!

PUBLISHED BY NIS America + MADE BY Idea Factory + IT COMES OUT February



It's got new characters and an original story, but all the same great mechs.


MS Saga: A New Dawn

The ultra-popular-in-Japan *Gundam* has never really caught on over here. Prior *Gundam* knowledge is not a prerequisite to enjoy this RPG, but you'll probably get more out of it if you have some. *MS Saga* is focused on customizing your mech with various parts pulled from the disparate *Gundam* series. This game should serve as a good tutorial for those not in the know.


PUBLISHED BY Bandai + MADE BY Bandai + IT COMES OUT March

PSM REVIEWS

NO CORPORATE SPONSOR, NO B.S. — WE TELL IT LIKE IT IS



Talk about a role reversal: You fight Dante playing as Vergil.



One of Vergil's weapon equip is for hand-to-hand combat, including moves such as this flashy flip kick finish.

20-BUCKING THE TREND

DEVIL MAY CRY: SPECIAL EDITION

The action classic gets even better... and cheaper?

HOW WE RATE GAMES

We take our reviews very seriously. We spend hours upon hours playing, testing each game so that we can give you the absolute best information to help you buy.

Games that score an **A**, **B**, or **C** earn a PSM Buy-Or-Die Award. We don't hand these beauties out easily, so if you see one on a review or anywhere else, you'll want to be sure to check that game out.

Finally, when looking up past scores, keep in mind that older games usually wouldn't fare as well if reviewed today since the bar is constantly being raised.

10 CLASSIC

A rare gem; our highest recommendation!

9 OUTSTANDING

One of the better games you'll play all year

8 VERY GOOD

You can't go wrong

7 GOOD

A solid game

6 OKAY

Kind of fun, but no big deal

5 SO-SO

You've got to really love this game

4 LACKING

Big flaws really hurt this game

3 BAD

Not fun at all

2 AWFUL

This game is an insult

1 WHY?

Why would anyone do this to us?

We're used to special editions of movies on DVDs. They usually cost more than the original release, but contain plenty of bonus content to please their hardcore fans and make up for the price differential. On the other hand, special edition videogames usually come with little more than fancier packaging (though this is slowly changing).

Not so with *Devil May Cry 3: Special Edition*. Taking a cue from Konami's upcoming *Metal Gear Solid 3: Subsistence*, Capcom has taken its already stellar action game sequel and made it even better with the inclusion of tons of bonus content, and more balanced gameplay. And the best part is, they've actually dropped the cost. Simply, *DMC3: SE* could very well be the best \$20 you'll ever spend on entertainment. Here's why.

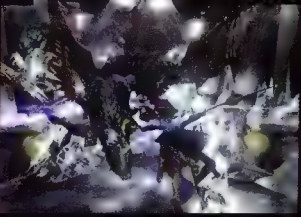
Start with a great game

Okay, you've got the original *DMC3*. This was the game that brought the series back into the spotlight as the action-adventure king (with a heavy emphasis on "action"). Actually a prequel to the original *Devil May Cry*, episode three in the series reminded us why Dante is one of the great videogame badasses of all time.

Instead of just prettying up the sword and gun combat in the first *DMC*, Capcom brought in some of the talent responsible for the various *Street Fighter* games. The idea was to take the simple shoot-and-slice gameplay and evolve it into something deeper and more rewarding by adding several different combat styles for the player to choose from; Dante would have more flamboyant gun moves with one, while another would reward the most hardcore gamer

We've heard of electric guitars, but this is just crazy. Looks like Dante hit a sour note, much to his enemy's chagrin.

"YOU CAN'T HELP BUT THINK THAT THIS IS THE COMPLETE, TRUE VISION FOR THE GAME"

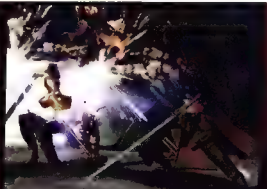


The game isn't totally different as Vergil — you still take on the same bosses and fight your way through many familiar locations.

cinemas again once you've beaten it.

No, I'm talking about Dante's twin brother, Vergil. In the original release of *DMC3*, he was a wicked-cool villain. In fact, most everyone who played the game ended up wishing they could play as him as well. Those prayers have finally been answered (didn't take very long, did it?). Vergil is now playable after you finish the game with Dante. More than just a clone of Dante, he actually has his own set of weapons (not just his katana, Yamato) and fighting styles, as well as his own sequence of new cutscenes.

Still, playing the game as Vergil isn't entirely different from a run-through with Dante from a gameplay standpoint, as the core combat system is pretty much the same. It does offer its own unique appeal, though, since Vergil mixes Dante's Trickster style with some moves of his own, all of which are tweaked depending on which weapons he's using. He has no guns, but can summon phantom spears.



Vergil's sword isn't as hefty as Dante's, but who cares when he looks this cool cutting through enemies with it?

They're hard to make out, but in this shot Vergil is launching phantom projectiles at the game's first boss.

by focusing on parrying attacks.

This, combined with a much broader selection of weapons, skill upgrades, and killer combos, made the game a joy to play... well, for most people. Although the game looked downright amazing, sported masterfully designed levels, and had some of the most thrilling cinematic sequences ever seen in a game, it proved almost prohibitively difficult.

Make it bigger and better

Thankfully, one of the first things Capcom has done in *DMC3: SE* is balance out the difficulty. The easy setting is now, well, pretty damned easy. On the other end is an additional harder(!) mode that's been added for those who like to live masochistic lives. Okay, so the difficulty problem has been addressed. Now anyone and everyone, no matter how weak-sauce they are, can now play all the way through the game.

Even if you did manage to beat the original edition, there are plenty of new reasons to play through the game again. No, I'm not just talking about the unlockable difficulty levels, a new endurance mini-game, the tweaked graphics, or even the ability to go back and watch all of the game's incredible



DEVIL MAY CRY 3: SPECIAL EDITION

PUBLISHED BY
Capcom

MADE BY
Capcom

HOW MUCH?
\$19.99

ESRB RATING
Mature

MULTIPLAYER
None

DIFFICULTY
Easy to infuriantly
difficult

SUPPORTS
+Pro Logic II

TRY THIS



†For those who've beaten the non-Special Edition, having the completed save on your memory card in slot one when you fire up *DMC3: SE* will unlock all the extra goodies from the get-go. Way to reward the series' devoted fans, Capcom!

PSM SCORE 9.5

LET'S ROCK, BABY

+Play as Vergil with his own weapons and cinemas; easy mode is actually easy.

CRY BABY

-Vergil could've used some more unique stages and enemies to call his very own.

HOW IT STACKS UP

Devil May Cry 3: Special Edition	9.5
Devil May Cry 3: Dante's Awakening	9
Prince of Persia: The Two Thrones	9
Genji: Dawn of the Samurai	7
Bujingai: The Forsaken City	7

The turn meter (at the bottom of the battle screen) lets you strategize your next move.



No RPG is complete until you've had a face-off against a giant cockroach. Seriously.



WILD ARMS 4

PUBLISHED BY
XSEED

MADE BY
Media.Vision

HOW MUCH?
\$49.99

ESRB RATING
Teen

MULTIPLAYER
No

DIFFICULTY
Manageable

SUPPORT
+WAAC: F saves



GO WEST

Wild ARMS 4

Not quite the same as it ever was

A quick surface glance at *Wild ARMS 4* reveals many things: you'll see the main character, Jude, armed with a gun; you'll notice that the game still takes place in the series' homeland of Filgaia; even the standard 'ARMS currency and first aid accoutrements — Gella and Heal Berries, respectively — make a return. Hence, it wouldn't be wrong to assume that this is another true-to-form sequel in the franchise.

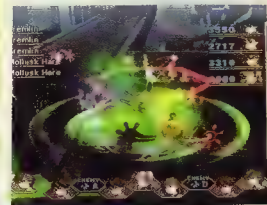
After actually playing the game, you'll see that the series has been turned on its head in a load of different ways. Remember those fast-paced, Force Power-fueled, turn-based fights? Gone — replaced by an interesting and slightly more complex grid system (though the Force Powers remain). How about your party's ability to utilize character-specific tools to travel around the expansive wastelands of Filgaia? Gone — replaced by your ability to only control Jude, while heave ho-ing the tools system with a more makeshift style of puzzle solving and

explorative platforming. Actually, wandering the barren world map doesn't happen anymore -- on-foot exploration is now reserved for dungeons and specific checkpoints on a world map (much in the vein of tactical RPGs like *Final Fantasy Tactics*). Seriously, for those who've come to know and love the *Wild ARMS* formula, playing *WA4* is akin to Dorothy landing in Oz after being stuck in Kansas her whole life. Simply, this is not the same series you've come to know and love over the last nine years — but that doesn't mean it doesn't have merit on its own.

Those aforementioned grid battles serve to add new layers of challenge and complexity to what used to be a rather straightforward combat system. On a field of seven hexagons, you and your four-member party can hopscotch across (usually only to adjacent slots) to score a good position against enemies, or to receive elemental boosts from specific grids holding different attributes. You'll even be able to intermittently learn combo-style attacks

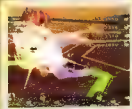
with your teammates if you happen to be on the same hex as them.

WA4's unique hybrid of pseudo-tactical combat, mixed with traditional turn-based combat speed, is pretty clever and keeps things interesting (good thing, too, since a good chunk of the game is spent fighting). It really makes you focus on your positioning, not only offensively, but even post match, as you have to occupy a hex to acquire the booty left in it. As wildly (pun intended) different as the combat



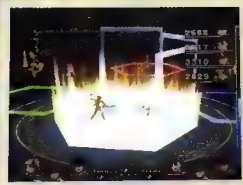
It's not always wise to keep all your characters in one hex on the combat map.

TRY THIS



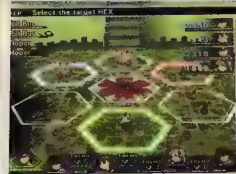
+ During combat, take care to place your characters on the elemental hex grids if you plan on casting magic spells. You can do exceptional amounts of damage if you happen to cast a spell from, say, a water-based grid onto an enemy in a fire-based grid. Some characters' Force Powers, most notably Yulie's, are determined by what type of grid they're in during a fight.

"BATTLE IS FAR AND AWAY WA 4'S STRONGEST POINT"



Casting support spells work well when you've grouped your team into one hex.

Battle takes a little while to come to grips with, but once you do—it can be rewarding.



Jude can slide, double-jump and stomp around on the field map—something you'll have to in order to get past some tricky environment puzzles.

is, it's not nearly as jarring as the new traveling system.

To put it plainly, you move from point to point on a static overworld map—yes, it's as boring as it sounds. Part of the thrill in most RPGs is discovering uncharted areas—something past *Wild ARMS* games did quite well—and *WA4* feels constricting because, well, there's no real exploration involved. Ain't nothing wild about a West that can't be conquered anyway.

So, is it the storyline that makes this *Wild ARMS* worth playing? Not so much—you'll find yourself trapped within overly-chatty dialogue sequences that seem to stretch as far as the day is long. The characters are likeable enough, and the voice talent ain't half bad either, but you really have to pre-

pare yourself for a lot of talking (both text and voiced). After some point, if you're like me, you'll find yourself skipping much of the "character development" to simply move through to the bigger plot points.

Despite these shortcomings, there's still something in the platform-y, puzzle-solving, grid-fighting gameplay of *WA4* that remains compelling. Also, the fact that it uses your old (or not so old) saves from *Wild ARMS Alter code: F* to unlock specific goodies is a great reward for series devotees, and Growth Points (GP)—which accumulate with gained levels—add a little oomph to the usual level grind. Battle is far and away *WA4*'s strongest point, and though the borderline kindergarten difficulty level of the game makes things a bit too easy at times (with the exception of an occasional cheap boss), the system works well enough to transcend this fact.

As a standalone title, *Wild ARMS 4* offers an experience enjoyable enough to keep RPG enthusiasts plugging through till the end. While it won't be remembered in the same light as some of the past *Wild ARMS* titles, we applaud its initiative in boldly trying to evolve the series into something grander. All it needs is a little refinement. **FRANCESCA REYES**



Amon
Amon
Fairylight
Fairylight

3550
2316
3310
3090

Oh, Yulie. Your support magic is wonderful for long fights, but boy don't we wish you could consistently do more physical damage than a small, blind hamster.

PSM 7.0 SCORE

WILD WEST

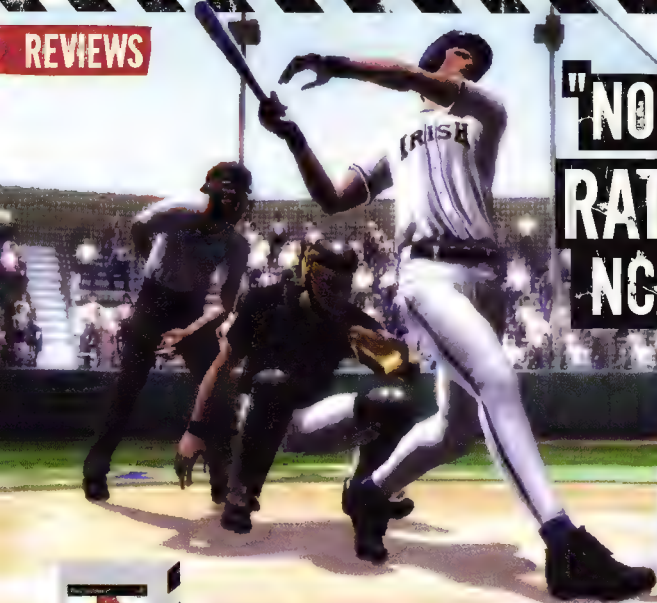
• Good battle system; learning combats is fun; lets you use old game saves.

OLD WEST

• Overworld map feels restricting; tool system is unimaginative; story too cliché.

HOW IT STACKS UP

Digital Devil Saga	8
Wild ARMS 4	7
Wild ARMS Alter code: F	6.5
Radiata Stories	6.5
Romancing SaGa	5



"NO ONE GIVES A RAT'S ASS ABOUT NCAA BASEBALL"



Sure, bats are good for hitting baseballs, but they also make good back scratchers.

NICHE APPEAL

MVP 06 NCAA Baseball

Good seats are still available

Let's face it — 80,000 people will pack the stands at any college football game, but you'd be hard pressed to find 8,000 at even the biggest college baseball match-ups. Nevertheless, the MLB license-less MVP 06 is easy to like — this is the same rock-solid MVP gameplay engine, after all — but impossible to love, because honestly, no one gives a rat's ass about NCAA baseball.

Though pitching remains the same, hitting and fielding have undergone radical changes for 06. Like breaking in a new baseball mitt, getting used to the new batting mechanic will take

time, but before long you'll never look back. As the pitch is delivered, you pull down on the right stick to transfer your weight to your back leg. Next, whip the stick forward to swing. Like in Tiger Woods, queuing up too early won't get much on the final cut. Timing is key, and you'll eventually learn to protect the plate, fouling off two-strike pitches like a real ballplayer.

Fielding, too, makes ambitious changes, but these don't succeed. Dives and jumps still work the same, but throwing is now done by pressing and holding in the direction assigned to each base. Unfortunately, the right stick functions overlap each other, creating a situation where you never know if you're in control or not. Say you want your 2B to dive for a ball hit up the middle. You press left on the stick to do so, but the game decides that your man will pick it up sans dive. Since you've picked up the ball without diving, your pressing left on the stick makes your guy automatically throw the ball to third base. That's unfortunate. This system also makes double plays frustrating and difficult to pull off. Thankfully you can revert to "classic" fielding.



It's just an innocent victory celebration, people. Get your minds out of the gutter.

The rest of the 06 diamond stays true to form, as the returning mini-games are fun and helpful, the ballpark editor is more robust, and franchise mode is as good as it ever was. After you revert the fielding back to the 2005 scheme, MVP 06 becomes a really fun baseball experience — only without the excitement and flair of the official MLB license. RYAN MCCAFFREY



MVP 06 NCAA BASEBALL

PUBLISHED BY Electronic Arts
MADE BY EA Canada

HOW MUCH? \$29.99

ESRB RATING Everyone

DIFFICULTY Adjustable

MULTIPLAYER Two-player

SUPPORT +Progressive Scan +Pro Logic II

TRY THIS



★ A few helpful tips for maximizing your fun and minimizing your pain in MVP 06: Switch hitting mode to "classic" in the gameplay options menu; avoid the race-inducing right-stick fielding. Spend a lot of your early playtime in the hitting mini-game. It will help you acclimate to the radically different batting system.



Dude, you've been standing like that for hours. Just throw the ball! Throw it!

PSM SCORE 7.0

COLLEGE BABES

★ Right-stick hitting is cool; core MVP goodies remain; nifty ballpark editor.

COLLEGE CLASSES

★ Right-stick fielding sucks; steep learning curve on right stick hitting.

HOW IT STACKS UP

MVP Baseball 2005	9
MLB 2K5	7.5
MVP Baseball (PSP)	7.5
MVP 06 NCAA Baseball	7
MLB 2006	6.5

"WHEN YOU DO SOLVE THE PUZZLES, THOUGH, YOU'RE LEFT WITH A FEELING OF REAL ACCOMPLISHMENT"

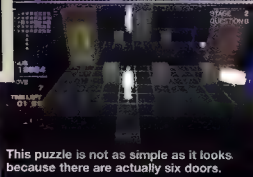


GET SMART

PQ



Safety tip: lift with your legs when picking up heavy objects in the real world.



This puzzle is not as simple as it looks because there are actually six doors.

Like math homework, but fun

Our first thought when playing *PQ: Practical Intelligence Quotient* was, "This could be the next *Lumines*." Not because it teases your senses with ultrahip tunes, or because it fills that block-dropping void in your life with *Tetris*-inspired gameplay. No, we thought that because it shares the same inherent qualities that makes *Lumines* so great: simple rules, gratifying gameplay.

PQ's puzzles are purely logic-based, so there are right and wrong answers to each of the game's 100 puzzles. Each tests a different part of your thinking process, such as memorization or foresight, and later combines different situations that require very complex solutions. Inevitably, this leads to trial-and-error gameplay, but that's the nature of the beast.

You'll move blocks, build stairs, avoid searchlights, and even use giant scales, the end goal always being the same: get to the exit in the least amount of time, using the least amount of moves. After completing

all of the puzzles, you'll be given a *PQ* score and a summary of your playing style, complete with advice on what areas you should work on.

We can't really fault any of the game's puzzles since they all have clever, logical solutions, but you have to go in knowing that you're not going to solve some of the puzzles for a long time — maybe ever. We can live with that. What really hinders the whole experience, though, is the camera sys-

tem since it never sticks to where you move it; it always snaps back to its origin. This makes examining each level and planning your strategy a real pain. Having a score based on speed and being given a time limit only makes it more frustrating.

When you do solve the puzzles, though, you're left with a feeling of real accomplishment. This is what makes *PQ* worth playing. Repeated plays give skewed results because you already know the solutions, so your *PQ* score doesn't really hold a lot of weight, but that's all irrelevant the first time through. **KAISER HWANG**

PSM SCORE 7.5

SMARTY

+ Nice, clean visual style; clever puzzles; can make you feel really smart.

FARTY

- Camera won't stick; difficulty is sporadic; can make you feel really dumb.

HOW IT STACKS UP

Lumines	8.5
PQ	7.5
Mercury	7
Frantix	7
Smart Bomb	6



Pushing and pulling blocks? Check. Laser beams? Check. Yep, this is a videogame.

PQ



PQ

PUBLISHED BY

D3Publisher

MADE BY

Now Production

HOW MUCH?

\$29.99

ESRB RATING

Everyone

MULTIPLAYER

No

DIFFICULTY

Easy to Insane

SUPPORTS

+Leaderboards via infrastructure mode

TRY THIS



+Because the game auto-saves your progress, it's hard to cheat and make your *PQ* higher. We said hard, not impossible. If you know you're going to fail the puzzle, or simply want more time to think about it, you can power your PSP off and reload the game, sans any penalties. Remember, though, cheating doesn't pay.

Yangus is actually going to star in his own *DQVIII* spin-off in Japan.

"SO CHARMING THAT MOST OF ITS WEAKNESSES MELT AWAY"



Yangus at

PSM BUY OR DIE!

OLD'S COOL

Dragon Quest VIII: Journey of the Cursed King

A charming blend of classic and new

Yall know about the *Dragon Warrior/Dragon Quest* franchise, right? It practically created the console RPG genre back on the NES, it blows away all other games in Japan (yes, even *Final Fantasy*), and it features character and monster designs from Mr. *Dragonball Z*, Akira Toriyama. Yet, somehow, the series has never caught on here. *Dragon Quest VIII* should fix that in a big way.

Words like "gorgeous" and "stunning" can't really do *DQVIII's* graphics justice. Mating a retina-searing, bold, bright and saturated color palette with lush, smooth animations, this is easily one of the PS2's most visually impressive games, both artistically and technologically — it's fatally breathtaking.

Gameplay itself is actually pretty typical (or "classic," if you prefer), with all the RPG clichés in tow: desperate exploration; tons of random monster encounters; a simple, turn-based battle system in which you enter everyone's actions, then watch the round play out; people who watch happily as you enter their house uninvited and loot their possessions; it's all there,

ultimately creating a very slow-paced game (those with short attention spans have been warned).

Crawling pace or not, the game is so charming that most of its weaknesses melt away. In addition to the crazy-beautiful graphical style, Toriyama's monster designs are fantastic, and there are delightful gameplay details everywhere. Some of our favorites include an alchemy pot that enables you to "cook up" new gear, the way you can recruit notorious monsters to fight in a monster arena, and Munchie's (the fuzzy critter who lives in your coat pocket) amusing reactions when given various cheeses during battle.

The bizarre-but-lovable cast cannot go without mention. There's the chubby, Yoda-like King Trode who constantly fawns over his horse Medea (who is actually his daughter, the princess), the sweet dim-witted Yangus, the womanizing Dante-look-a-like Angelo, and the fiery bombshell Jessica. Their interactions keep things light even amid a dark, serious storyline that never ceases to end — this 80+ hour quest is never over when you think



High prices (see: Mana Sword) mean Everything — not just the battles — looks like it's leapt straight out of an anime movie.



The combat is slow and measured, but nonetheless satisfying as it plays out.



They're not Tyrants. They're not Tyrannosaurs. They're Tyrantosaurs!

it is. We're not complaining, though, because this is one of the PS2's finest RPGs. Check it out, and experience the wonder Japanese gamers have felt for nearly 20 years. **ERIC BRATCHER**



DRAGON QUEST VIII

PUBLISHED BY Square Enix

MADE BY Level-5

HOW MUCH? \$49.99

ESRB RATING Teen

DIFFICULTY Average

MULTIPLAYER None

SUPPORT +FF XII demo

TRY THIS



★ Dairy products are always good for a laugh. Try feeding cheese to Munchie by using it as an item during battle. You can also use the Alchemy Pot to make different types of cheese which will have different effects.

PSM 9.0

BUNNY SUIT ★ Amazing graphics that complement art design perfectly; charisma for miles.
DIRTY UNDIES ★ Slow pace; gameplay doesn't stray far from the usual fare; playing mix.

HOW IT STACKS UP

Dragon Quest VIII	9
Digital Devil Saga	8
Makai Kingdom	8
Wild ARMS Alter code: F	6.5
Raiden Stories	6.5

"WHILE THE MONKEYS
REMAIN CUTE, THE
SERIES HAS STARTED
REPEATING ITSELF"

The Stun Club is like a light-saber without the dismemberment. This is a family game, you know.

MONKEYBUSTERS, INC.

Ape Escape 3

Lots more monkeys, few new ideas

Ape Escape was one of the best platformers on PSone, combining innovative dual-stick controls with hilariously stylized monkeys. How many games can claim that? While the monkeys remain cute, however, the series has started repeating itself. *Ape Escape 3* continues that trend, leaving you with a game that's solid, but never feels as fresh as it should.

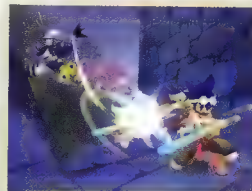
Playing as Kei or Yumi, you've got seven familiar, dual-shock-controlled gadgets to help in your simian search. New in this game are seven time-limited magical costumes, which grant the kids some handy powers. The gunslinger suit gives long-range offense and capture ability, for instance, while the snazzy ninja duds give 'em super speed and agility. The costumes are fun, but they don't add enough to the overall package to make up for the lack of other significant gameplay upgrades.

Most of the levels are based on TV and movie parodies, and you'll have a bit of fun spotting the little jokes. You can even make little movies starring the 434 (or so) catchable apes, though you'll be hard-pressed to squeeze *Citizen Kane* into the 15 second limit. More diverting is the unlockable *Mesal Gear Solid* mini-game, which is the flipside to MGS3's Snake vs. Monkey mode. Cute.

Ape Escape 3 looks bright and cartoony, but the jumpy framerate

and quarrelsome camera are distracting. The latter has always been a problem — guess the third time's not the charm. It's still a pretty good game, but the series needs to jump off the banana peel it's riding toward mediocrity. These chimps deserve better.

BENJAMIN TURNER



With the ninja costume you can slash baddies up like something outta *Tenchu*... a ninja, to be specific.

PSM 7.0
SCORE

MONKEY SEE

†Tons of apes to snag; costumes are a cute addition; bright and colorful.

MONKEY DOO

†The series is sadly stagnating; ify camera; framerate is highly variable.

HOW IT STACKS UP

Ratchet & Clank: Up Your Arsenal	10
Maximo Vs. Army of Zin	9
Sly 3: Honor Among Thieves	8
Ape Escape 2	8
Ape Escape 3	7

The gadgets should be instantly familiar to fans of the previous games.



While not exactly taken from a *Bond* movie, the flying squirrel gizmo seems to work just fine.

CHIMP CHUMPS

Cheeky Monkeys

The apes are especially feisty this time around. Most of them take multiple hits from your stun club; and even then they'll only stay put for a second. The worst ones will even try to grab your gear themselves. Go into danger mode if they get your time net — they could send you right out of the level!



Watch out for those sly simians! You could get blasted right out of the level!



APE ESCAPE 3

PUBLISHED BY SCEA

MADE BY SCEI

HOW MUCH? \$39.99

ESRB RATING Everyone

MULTIPLAYER None

DIFFICULTY Monkey

SUPPORTS +Pro Logic II +Widescreen

TRY THIS



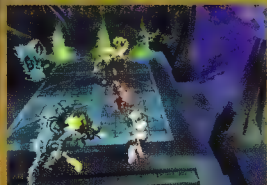
† In *Ape Escape 2* your monkey bought silly, but useless unlockables. This time there's a useful store to plunder: 300 coins will get you another costume energy tank. Get all ten of these as soon as possible and never worry about energy again!

"DON'T GET ME WRONG, THE GAME HAS ITS MOMENTS"

As *Gauntlet* veterans know, one-on-one battles are a rare occurrence.



There are all kinds of bad guys to fight, including pirates! No ninjas, though...



The levels are quite varied, which makes things visually interesting at least. Some areas feel like you're in *God of War*.

BACK TO THE PAST

Gauntlet: Seven Sorrows

Hack... Slash... Hack... Slash... Hack...

To say that *Gauntlet: Seven Sorrows* is a repetitive game would be putting it mildly. It basically breaks down to bouts of hacking and slashing, with maybe a few switches to push or keys to find — in other words, it's exactly like the very first *Gauntlet*. While the original game was fun for its time, the times have changed, and this series needs to play catch-up, quick.

Don't get me wrong, the game has its moments. As is expected for a *Gauntlet* title, the game is best enjoyed when shared, as multiplayer is the series' bread and butter, and the fact that you can play the game online certainly helps matters. The storytelling even starts off with some potential, unraveling a tale of betrayal that would be genuinely compelling if it weren't for the fact that the

storytelling is so bland and obvious. It quickly becomes apparent that the plot is just used as a cheap tool to tie the game's disjointed levels together.

As for the gameplay, there's nothing inherently wrong with hacking and slashing; but there's a right way and a wrong way to do it. After all, we love games like *Champions of Norrath* and *X-Men Legends*. A bolstered experience and customization system would have helped immensely, and would have made the game's enjoyment less dependent on a multiplayer crutch. Still, it's a decent romp when playing with others, even if it does get old after a while. **JUSTIN CHENG**



GAUNTLET: SEVEN SORROWS

PUBLISHED BY Midway

MADE BY Midway

HOW MUCH? \$49.99

ESRB RATING Teen

MULTIPLAYER 4-player co-op

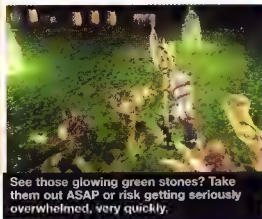
DIFFICULTY Adjustable

SUPPORTS Online play

TRY THIS



+ The key to having fun with *Gauntlet: Seven Sorrows* is to gather some friends and play cooperatively. Nothing can beat the experience of having all your buddies sitting around a single television and just playing through the game together.

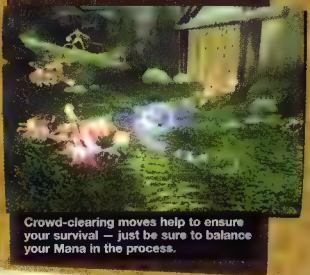


See those glowing green stones? Take them out ASAP or risk getting seriously overwhelmed, very quickly.

MORE COWBELL

Fear the Reaper

It's in your best interest to save up your Mana until you absolutely need it since it's the only way to defeat Death. But sometimes you'll need to use your Mana Blast to clear out all the bad guys surrounding you, leaving you without enough power to take out Death if he shows his grisly visage. As such, you may want to focus on upgrading your Mana regeneration, or invest in crowd-clearing special moves that use only a small fraction of your Mana.



Crowd-clearing moves help to ensure your survival — just be sure to balance your Mana in the process.

PSM 6.0 SCORE

LUCKY SEVEN

+ Multiplayer is fun; special moves and combos add a little depth to the combat.

SEVEN SINS

+ Gameplay worked in the past, but needs to be reinvented at this point.

HOW IT STACKS UP

Mortal Kombat: Shaolin Monks	8
Spartan: Total Warrior	7
Lego Star Wars	7
Gauntlet: Seven Sorrows	6
Duke: Kings	6

50 shoots his anonymous enemy with enough force to breach an armored car, yet he's still not dead.

"ENEMIES SLIDE AROUND LIKE ICE CAPADES WHICH MAKES DRAWING AND HOLDING A BEAD ON THEM AKIN TO CATCHING LUBRICATED FROGS WITH YOUR TOES"

CENT AND CENTSIBILITY

50 Cent: Bulletproof

Control 50 Cent. On second thought, don't...

We write this review knowing full well that it may be our last, but all G-Unit death threats aside, there's really no point in mincing words: *Bulletproof* blows. It takes us back to a time when cell phones were the size of Subway sandwiches, the ozone layer wasn't full of gaping holes, and a company called Acclaim churned out videogames like they were going out of style (or business, as they eventually did).

From the opening music video to the closing credits, the whole game plays like an extended G-Unit com-

mercial. As you rush through repetitive urban environments with guns blazing — usually flanked by such lovable thugs as Lloyd Banks and Tony Yayo — you quickly realize: making those guns blaze is actually a chore. Most weapons are inaccurate, so you're forced to hold your aiming reticle over an enemy for a second or two before pulling the trigger. It's not realistic recoil or anything that clever; the programming just sucks. The bigger problem is that enemies are constantly sliding around in front of you like the damn Ice Capades, which makes drawing and holding a bead on them akin

to catching lubricated frogs with your toes on a cold day. You'll repeatedly find yourself emptying a full clip to kill a dude at point-blank range.

With the release of the game coinciding with the feature film based on 50's real life, *Get Rich or Die Tryin'*, it would seem to follow that the game would attempt to provide the interactive equivalent — play through 50's experience, see things as he saw them, pop a few caps. Instead, the storyline revolves around your friend K-Dog, who's gotten into some trouble; the first level, rather than portraying tugged-out street drama, sees 50 and friends shooting *hundreds of heavily armed covert ops soldiers dropping out of helicopters*. Somehow, it just doesn't feel like anyone behind this game cared about keeping it real.

Though his schtick is starting to grow tired, we've been fans of 50, and the notion of playing through his overwrought urban fantasy didn't sound all that bad. Horrible, derivative gameplay, however, combined with a seemingly tacked-on narrative make this the gangsta equivalent of a licensed lunchbox. Hate it or love it? You know the answer by now...

EVAN SHAMOON



It's be easy to cap this guy in any other game, but your bullets would probably miss in this one.



50 CENT: BULLETPROOF

PUBLISHED BY Vivendi

MADE BY Genuine Games

HOW MUCH? \$49.99

ESRB RATING Mature

MULTIPLAYER None

DIFFICULTY Average

SUPPORT +Nothing

TRY THIS



+ While there's no radar in the game, you have the next best thing: a group of G-Unit-ers. Let these guys find the enemies for you. Then go in and do what you do best — clean up.



"Carl, you're in back, but at least look interested. We're trying for a group shot here."

PSM SCORE 4.0

GANGSTA

† Lots of guns. Some good cut-scenes. Enormous soundtrack.

WANKSTA

‡ Feels like it was made for G-Unit members... and nobody else.

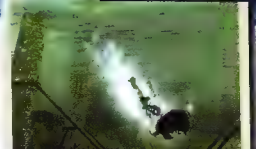
HOW IT STACKS UP

Resident Evil 4	10
Star Wars Battlefront II	9
Ratchet: Deadlocked	8
187: Ride or Die	7.5
50 Cent: Bulletproof	4

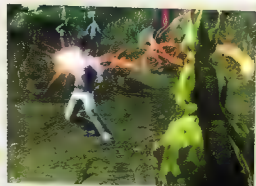
"THE MOST FUN GAME IN THE SERIES"



Working together to solve puzzles is one of the better aspects of the game.



Even though only one person can play the Triwizard tasks, they give the game some much-needed variety.



If it's green and mobile, it's probably not one of your really good friends...



HARRY POTTER AND THE GOBLET OF FIRE

PUBLISHED BY EA

MADE BY EA UK

HOW MUCH? \$39.99

ESRB RATING Everyone

MULTIPLAYER 3-player co-op

DIFFICULTY Easy to average

SUPPORTS + Multitap + Pro Logic II

THREE'S COMPANY

Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire

4th book + 3 wizards = 1 good game

To quote the competition, "It's good to play together." Case in point: *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*, a game that doesn't do anything really special other than giving you and two friends the opportunity to assume the roles of the three principal characters. It's this cooperative play that makes this the most fun game in the series.

There's a simple joy in covering each other's backs and collaborating to solve a puzzle. This feeling is diminished when playing by yourself,

as you're left with incompetent AI allies to back you up. It also hurts that you have so much backtracking to do when trying to find the Triwizard Shields. Yes, exploring is fun, but repeatedly returning to the same levels makes it less so. This certainly isn't helped by the long loads between levels.

The aforementioned co-op play is enjoyable enough to make it all worthwhile. Plus, Harry's Triwizard events give the game a good amount of gameplay variety. This is by no

means a perfect game, but it serves the license admirably and is definitely worth playing through with friends.

JUSTIN CHENG

PSM SCORE 7.0

DUMBLEDORE

+Three-player, *Lego Star Wars*-esque co-op play makes the game a lot of fun.

SNAPE

-Too much backtracking; camera can be difficult; ally AI should be better.

GET EQUIP WITH FUN!

Mega Man X Collection

A dazzling collection of robotic classics

Mega Man "grew up" back in 1983, and unlike certain dark Hedgehogs, he didn't turn into an angst-filled loser. Indeed, *Mega Man X* was an awesome platform-action game that grew beyond the rehashed boundaries of his played-out 8-bit adventures. Unfortunately, the X series has had its own ups and downs since.

You can see for yourself in *Mega Man X Collection*, which gathers six of the eight "X" games into one convenient package. It also tosses in the import-only obscurity, *Mega Man Battle & Chase*, should you want to

engage in a little robot-based kart racing fun. You'll need to unlock it by playing lots of the other six games.

Luckily, that proves more fun than not. *Mega Man X* is still a super-tight action game, with fantastic music and killer gameplay. X2? Not as good. X3? Gettin' better (it's the PlayStation version). X4 is a return to excellence, while X5 and X6 are awful. While the game quality is uneven, the ports are perfect, the controls are configurable, and the high points of this collection are well worth experiencing; a rare example of a perfectly done retro collection. **BENJAMIN TURNER**



X indulges in the classic strategy known as "shooting it in the eye."



PSM SCORE 8.0

METAL BLADE

+Great recreations of the *MMX* games, with kart-racing for good measure.

BUBBLE LEAD

-Some of the games are pretty weak; remixed music is nowhere to be found.

+ PUBLISHED BY Capcom + MADE BY Capcom + HOW MUCH? \$29.99 + ESRB Everyone + MULTIPLAYER 2-player offline in *Mega-Man B & C*
+ DIFFICULTY Mega Buster + SUPPORTS Online multiplayer

PORTA-POTION

Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire

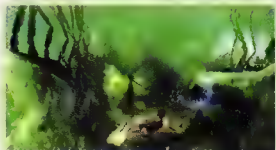
A full-scale Potter in the palm of your hands

The PSP version of *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire* is almost exactly the same as the PS2 version, so if you've tried that game, you should pretty much know what to expect. Being a mostly faithful port, as impressive as it is, it has its downsides — the same flaws that hamper its bigger sibling show their ugly mugs here (PSP pattern #1), including questionable ally AI, a lot of backtracking, and some camera issues. Actually, there's a bit of give and take: the camera issues are further exacerbated by the smaller PSP screen (PSP pattern #2), and the

controls feel sluggish, but at least there's a little less backtracking since a whole level has been cut.

Adding a little more to the "give" aspect, four mini-games are included (PSP pattern #3), and they are a good distraction from the main game, allowing for some quick gaming action while on the go.

This version of *Goblet of Fire* is a good choice for those who find themselves away from their PS2s a lot but still want to play the game, but ultimately, between the two, the console version is just a better option all around. **JUSTIN CHENG**



PSM SCORE **6.5**

HARRY POTTER

It's got almost everything the PS2 version has, plus a few mini-games.

VOLDEMORT

The same problems that hurt the PS2 version hurt this one; sluggish controls.

You'll see a lot of the same stuff from the PS2 version, so unless you're a hardcore *Harry Potter* fan, there's no real reason to buy both.



HARRY POTTER AND THE GOBLET OF FIRE

PUBLISHED BY EA

MADE BY EA UK

HOW MUCH? \$39.99

ESRB RATING Everyone

MULTIPLAYER 3-player ad hoc

DIFFICULTY Easy to average

SUPPORT +Ad hoc multiplayer



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Art: Infield Rowland, Game Art & Design: Student, The Art Institute of California — Los Angeles

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PSP

PSM BUY OR DIE!



PRINCE OF PERSIA REVELATIONS

PUBLISHED BY

Ubisoft

MADE BY

Pipeworks

HOW MUCH? \$49.99

ESRB RATING

Mature

MULTIPLAYER

No

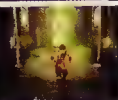
DIFFICULTY

Average

SUPPORTS

+Nothing

TRY THIS



Given the dark nature of the visuals, the game can be hard to see in bright light due to the glare caused by the super-reflective PSP screen. We highly suggest playing in a dimmed environment, or under your bed sheets, for the least possible hassle.



Visually, the game looks almost exactly like the console version, only with some lower-res textures and character models.



Most of the time the camera will give a workable view automatically.

"THERE'S NO OTHER GAME THAT HAS BETTER PLATFORMING AND CONTROLS THAT ARE AS RESPONSIVE"

TIME AFTER TIME

Prince of Persia: Revelations

A port we actually don't mind too much

Despite the Prince's change in musical taste, we still loved *Pop: Warrior Within* on the PS2. In fact, it was one of our favorite games of 2004, full of memorable platforming, visceral combat, and a story that somehow made sense despite all the paradoxes inherent to time-travel plots. Not surprisingly, the game has made its way to the PSP in an essentially faithful package (renamed as *Revelations*), and even includes some new levels that have been seamlessly integrated into the experience.

As a PSP title, *Revelations* doesn't have much competition. There's no other game that has better platforming and controls that are as responsive, but the Prince has not come away unscathed in the porting process. Like every other PSP game derived from a console version, the control scheme has been modified to accommodate the lack of button options and a second analog stick.

In the case of *Revelations*, all of the vital moves are as they should be, with camera controls being the primary victim. Assigned to the d-pad buttons, what was once a smooth, natural affair is now an exercise in running, stopping, looking around, and moving on.

For the most part this isn't a deal-breaker, since the platforming is already paced in a similar way. There

are a few instances, though, that you'll have to manually search for direction — a problem compounded by the smaller screen size. There are also some weird sound bugs where the audio won't be synched with the onscreen action, and the game has a penchant for random loading in seemingly bizarre spots.

Ironically, what detracts most from *Revelations* is the fact that its console sequel, *The Two Thrones*, has been released. Arguably the best in the series, the game amplifies any shortcomings *Warrior Within* had, namely the backtracking and overall lack of guidance in where to go next. Of course, being based on that game, *Revelations* also suffers from the same irritations. Even so, the game still holds up quite nicely today, and on a platform lacking quality titles in the platforming-action genre, you really can't do better than this.

PSM SCORE 8.0

POCKET PRINCE

+New content; mostly faithful to console version; still great after all this time.

POCKET LINT

-Lots of random loads; sound bugs; needs better camera and map system.

HOW IT STACKS UP

Prince of Persia: Revelations	8.5
Death Jr.	7.5
Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire	7.5
Tokobot	7
MediEvil Resurrection	7

KAISER HWANG



Just because I'm half-naked doesn't mean I don't like to read. You wouldn't have a copy of *Dune*, would you?

MY OWN MINI-ME

The Sims 2

Dude, where's my Sim?

The only problem with *The Sims 2* for PSP is that it's not really a *Sims* game. The Goals and Aspirations added to earlier console versions have completely taken over the PSP title to where you're actually playing an adventure game set in the *Sims* universe, rather than *The Sims*. It's not bad, but not what some might expect. You begin as a happy Sim driving through the Southwest whose car breaks down in Strangetown. Strangetown quickly lives up to its

'name when not only your car, but also the mechanic who was working on it and his whole garage disappear into thin desert air. The game then becomes *The Sims* filtered through *Dude, Where's My Car?* as you uncover Strangetown's many secrets, find your vehicle, and get the heck out.

The usual *Sims* exhaustion/food/potty cycle gets pushed into the background, and social interaction is replaced by interesting-but-repetitive mini-games called Chat, Flirt, and Intimidate. In fact, *Sims 2* for PSP may



Some things in life are pretty vague, and require you to read between the lines. This is not one of them.

be the world's first T-rated slattern simulator, since you wind up threatening and seducing literally every single NPC in the game before you're through.

In the end, though, the whole exercise is as enjoyable as it is bizarre, carried off mostly thanks to the patented *Sims* humor and skewed worldview. It ain't quite *The Sims*, but it works.

JETT LUNDRIGAN

PSM SCORE 7.5

QUIRKY

➔One word: quirky. This just wouldn't work if it weren't *The Sims*.

JENKY

~ Load times are main the problem; players may not like the adventure aspect.

FINGER FOOTY

FIFA Soccer 06

EA irons out all the kinks

FIFA Soccer 05 was one of the PSP's original launch titles and, while in some ways an impressive demonstration of the handheld's power to translate console games into miniaturized, subway-friendly versions, it also had its fair share of flaws. Fortunately, *FIFA 06* goes a long way to remedy them.

Anyone used to playing *FIFA* on PS2 will be right at home here. The game achieves essentially the same feel as its console counterparts; the huge, open pitch, and, depending on your perspective, somewhat slippery controls provide a remarkably realistic soccer experience. The key flaws from the original—such as how the action would come to a screeching halt whenever the ball crossed the end line, whether or not the ball was going into the net—have been fixed, providing a noticeably overall experience.

If you need soccer right now on your PSP, this is your best bet. It's not perfect, mind you, but it's still damn fun to play.

Perhaps the best thing about the game is the beefed-up Challenge feature, which puts you in various situations, such as being down two goals to Manchester United with 15 minutes to play. It's a very PSP-friendly mode, conducive to moments when you don't have the time/battery life to play a full match. It's also fully online, which the last game was not.

While it has its flaws—opposing players occasionally run out of bounds for no reason, a lack of 360-degree camera control in replays, etc.—*FIFA 06* should quench your thirst for portable football.



EVAN SHERMAN

PSM SCORE 7.0

THE JOY

➔Good action; feels like real soccer; PSP-friendly modes; full multiplayer game.

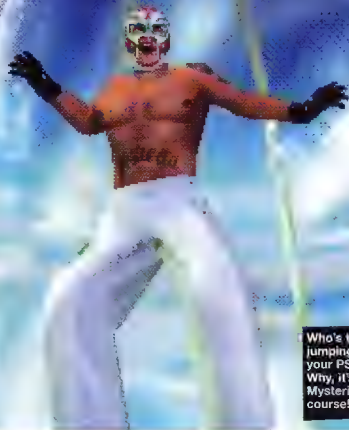
THE PAIN

~ Players are tiny; looks like a poor man's PS2 game. AI still freaks out occasionally.

PSP

"THIS VERSION ALSO HAS THE SAME FLAWS AS ITS SIBLING"

PSM BUY OR DIE!



Who's that jumping onto your PSP? Why, it's R-E-Y Mysterio, of course!



The German Suplex has almost as much impact here as it does on the PS2... almost.



Obviously the character models aren't as lifelike, but you can still tell who the wrestlers are.



WWE
SMACKDOWN! VS.
RAW 2006

PUBLISHED BY
THQ

MADE BY
Yukes Media

HOW MUCH?
\$49.99

ESRB RATING
Teen

MULTIPLAYER
4-player versus

DIFFICULTY
Adjustable

SUPPORTS
• PSP to PS2
• Ad hoc multiplayer
• Online Play

TRY THIS



• Like in the PS2, game reviewers miss the touchpad key. If you're playing against friends and/or work together, getting the touchpad to work is a pain. If you don't have it, you'll have to try different ways of playing the game.

MINIMANIA

WWE Smackdown! Vs. RAW 2006

The WWE runs wild on your PSP

For anyone who has played *WWE Smackdown! Vs. RAW 2006* on PS2, you should know precisely what this game is all about the minute you pick it up—it's almost the exact same game, save for a few differences. The locker room, for instance, is gone and replaced with a menu system that's actually easier to navigate. There are also a few amusing PSP-exclusive mini-games (see sidebar) included, while the annoyingly repetitive commentary has been axed due to the PSP's hardware limitations.

Everything else remains pretty much intact. The game still looks great—not as good as its PS2 counterpart, of course, but still quite impressive for a PSP game—and the controls are only slightly modified, so it's relatively easy to pick up and play.

Being a port, this version also has the same flaws as its sibling, namely the clipping and collision detection problems. Also, since the PSP's screen is a lot smaller than the average television, it can be difficult to see the action when there are more than two wrestlers fighting at once; the camera zooms way out to keep all the wrestlers onscreen, even when they're across the arena from each other.

The game's biggest sin, however, is the sheer amount of loading there is. Not just between matches, but between *everything*: if you want to see the wrestlers' entrances, you'll have to wait as it loads up; win a match, and you're waiting for the celebration animation to load up; create a character, and you'll even notice small loads while you're customizing him. You're actually better off creating a character in the PS2 version and transferring him to the PSP if you want to play on the go. In fact, portability is the primary reason to play this version—the fact that you can continue your progress while you're on the road is what makes the game worth playing, even with its technical shortcomings. **JUSTIN CHENG**



Ouch! That's 500 pounds on poor Rey's body. As Carlito would say, "That's not cool."

PSM 8.0

FACE

†Almost the same as the PS2 version; can transfer your progress to PS2.

HEEL

–Loadfastic; the clipping and collision problems afflict this version as well.

HOW IT STACKS UP

WWE SmackDown! Vs. RAW 2006	8
WWE SmackDown! Vs. RAW (PSP)	8
WWE SmackDown! Vs. RAW	8
Rumble Roses	7
Backyard Wrestling 2	5.5

BRAWNY BRAINS

Three times the fun

If you've had three or four times the fun in wrestling, there are three mini-games you can play. Our personal favorite game in the WWE Games Show is using your knowledge of the game and the WWE. In general, a lot of people think that it's better to use the mini-games, but it's not. It's a fun way to test your knowledge of the game and the WWE. It's a fun way to test your knowledge of the game and the WWE. It's a fun way to test your knowledge of the game and the WWE.



Big pop comes with Rey Show's finishing move. Rey's finisher is the same as Rey's finisher. Rey's finisher is the same as Rey's finisher. Rey's finisher is the same as Rey's finisher.



Everyone loves monkeys, but not everyone will love all the mini-games.

that is your only hope!

APETH GRADE

Ape Escape Academy

Sony apes Mario, but shows up late for the party

Unlike previous *Ape Escape* games, *Ape Escape Academy* is a collection of mini-games and not a full-fledged platformer — it's actually more *Mario Party* than anything else. There are 40 mini-games in total, and while the concept of pick-up-and-play gaming is certainly PSP-friendly, uneven quality and painful loading times temper the monkey storm.

After an absurdly straightforward training session, you jump right into it. Some of the games are fun: the 100 meter dash is simple and entertaining, while the monkey parachuting game (collect oncoming parachutes as you fall, hand them to screaming monkey friends as they pass you by in the air) is stupid fun.

But the below-par games are just as widespread, as you'll realize the first time you play the bowling or math quiz (yup, you heard us right) diversions. What makes this worse is that you can't quit a play session and begin again — you're forced to complete a group of nine mini-games before you can start over. Combined with slow loading times, fairly uninspired graphics, and the same damn repetitive calypso soundtrack we've heard in countless games of this sort, it's hard to recommend *Ape Escape Academy*. Great "kiddie" games can appeal to both kids and adults; this one, sadly, isn't likely to properly satiate either.

EVAN SHAMOON



APE ESCAPE ACADEMY

PUBLISHED BY
Sony

MADE BY
Shift/SCEA

HOW MUCH?
\$39.99

ESRB RATING
Everyone

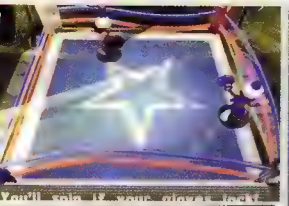
MULTIPLAYER
2-player versus, 4-player party

DIFFICULTY
Average

SUPPORTS
Multiplayer



If only we were clever enough to come up with these insanely ridiculous concepts...



Sometimes, a picture can speak a thousand words. In the case of this image, it's saying about... two.

PSM SCORE 6.0

THE APE
#Entertaining mini-games; colorful (for the kids); apes are funny-looking.

APE POOP
-Uneven quality; long loading times; too much talking puts a dent in the gameplay.

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NICHE-TYPE THING!

PSP2TV

Sometimes you just have to wonder why

This cool PSP mod is a bulky cradle/faceplate combo that can send your PSP's stereo sound and video signal (in either 4:3 or 16:9) to any television with an S-video input. You can also play PSP games with your trusty PS2 controller, complete with a turbo function, though the extra analog stick and shoulder buttons have no use.

Installation is no picnic. There's no soldering involved, and the screwdrivers are included, but you still need to almost completely dissect and reassemble your PSP—which completely scuttles your warranty.

More importantly, the PSP visuals don't translate to the full screen very well at all. We're not sure how much of the signal loss is the PSP2TV's



fault and how much is a side effect of playing on a bigger screen, but games actually look a lot like PS one games, with chunky textures and tons of jagged. UMD movies fare even worse,

with serious color-banding issues and a really low-res image. The device still has some niche appeal, but its image quality makes it more a novelty than a necessity. **ERIC BRATCHER**

PSP2TV comes with three alternate faceplates: blue, black, and silver.

INSTALLATION IS NO PICNIC

PSP2TV

MADE BY Farmer Entertainment/Team Xtender
HOW MUCH? \$120.00

PSM 6.0

HIGH DEF
* Come on, it's PSP video on a TV. That's cool! No soldering required, either.
STATIC
- Even without soldering, installation is still a nightmare. Low-res images really stink.

HANDS ON

GetTabz thumb grips



It's a simple concept: You hold your thumbs on these tabs instead of on the analog sticks or on the surface of the controller. The result? A more secure grip and more control. The grips are made of a soft, rubbery material and are easy to install. They're made by GetTabz and cost \$5.99.

PSM 8.5

WINNER
+Grip your thumbs like a rubber glove wearing rubber-soled Nikes.
LOSER
- Hides to look at; instructions could destroy your controller.

Nyko Theater Experience PSP



It's a simple concept: You hold your thumbs on these tabs instead of on the analog sticks or on the surface of the controller. The result? A more secure grip and more control. The grips are made of a soft, rubbery material and are easy to install. They're made by GetTabz and cost \$5.99.

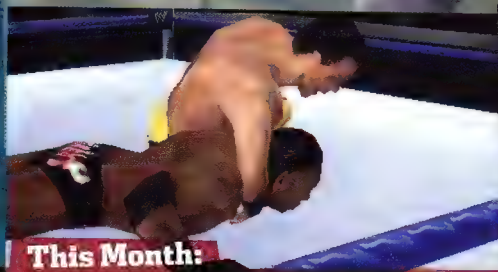
PSM 8.0

TURN ON
+Very secure; better built-in battery; annoying audio buzz is fixed.
TURN OFF
-It's still huge; some dedicated speaker sale still sound more full.

**SUPER
PLAY**

PSM THUNDERDROME!

For **Chris Slate**, videogames aren't just a job — they're also a great way to impose your iron will upon your humble subjects. Thus, every month, the PSM editors enter the **THUNDERDROME** to prove that they have what it takes to call themselves hardcore... and to amuse Chris, who likes to talk about Hulk Hogan's "18-inch pythons", but doesn't realize the Hulkster is talking about his biceps. Yes. Be afraid. We are.



**THIS
MONTH'S
COMBATANTS**
Chris Vs. Randy V.
Justin V. Eric

This Month:

WWE Smackdown! Vs. Raw for PSP

Chris: To me, all those who hunger and thirst for me to layeth the smacketh down! It is time for us to enter the squared circle and see, once and for all, who looks the best in a fake tan and brightly colored man-tights!

Justin: Please tell me you're talking about a wrestling game.

Chris: Indeed, my young underling-who-should-not-expect-any-mercy-just-because-he-wears-glasses, I am referring to *WWE: SmackDown! Vs. RAW 2006* for PSP. Now come, all of you! It has been a long week, and you must pay dearly.

Randy: Pay? Crap, all I have is two dollars. Justin, can you spot me?

Chris: Silence! For that, you will be the first to taste the wrath of the Great Slate!

Randy: You're making lunch? I didn't know you could cook!

Justin: Oh, this is going to be good.

Match One: Randy the Redhead vs. The Great Slate

Chris: Prepare yourself, young one. For the Great Slate, in the form of the Rabid Wolverine Chris Benoit, is about to administer a beat-down to your sissy Booker T. Now, die! Augh! You reversed my attack? How dare you?

Justin: Of course he did! Reversals are the fundamental building block of the game. The right trigger reverses grabs, and the left trigger reverses strikes.

Chris: Silence! Of course, the Great Slate knew that. Stop helping his opponent. Now, to stage a comeback...

[Minutes later]... Ha! Benoit is the victor!

Randy: Huh, that's weird. I'd swear my character got slower the more times I did that body slam.

Justin: That's exactly what happened. There's a momentum meter, so the more times you repeat a move, the less crowd support you get. This, combined with the fact that too many big moves in quick succession will really drain your stamina, gives your opponent the perfect

opportunity for a comeback. It also helped that he worked one specific body part — in this case, your leg — relentlessly.

Match Two: Justin "Sane" Cheng vs. Kaiser "Killer" Hwang

Justin: Okay Kaiser, choose your fighter.

Kaiser: The whale may not fit in the teacup, but woe to he who has to contend with a coffee-covered marine mammal.

Justin: Right... I'll just be Rey Mysterio. And you're... oh, The Big Show. I should have known... never mind.

Kaiser: If you were teaching a robin how to fly, what advice would you give the worm?

Randy: I just love when he talks. It's like a puzzle game.

Eric: I think he's asking for gameplay advice.

Justin: Eric? What are you doing here?

Eric: Hey, you guys and me, we're like family! I really missed you! It's all lonely over there,

and I...

Justin: You were actually spacing out on your way back from the candy machine again and just came this way out of habit, didn't you?

Eric: ...shut up and teach Yoda there how to play the game. I'll see you later.

Justin: Okay Kaiser, here's a tip. There's more risk and reward this time around. When you're in a sleeper hold, for example, you can try to get out as soon as possible by hitting the sweet spot within the first two drops of your hand... or you can wait till the third drop and hit the button in the red zone to do a reversal. It's risky since the red zone is so tiny and it's your last chance to stage a comeback, but it can really help you out, too. Also, some submission holds rely on hitting the blue zones to escape, but your opponent can tap the X button to shake the meter, which makes it more difficult to accurately hit the escape zones. Fortunately, your opponent can't shake the meter during sleeper holds. Got it?

Kaiser: Forget it. I can never understand what you're saying.

Match Three: Tag Team! Chris and Randy vs Kaiser and Justin

Chris: Ah, the drama! Former opponents are now teammates! Who will be the true victor? Augh! What happened? The Great Slate's fighter is as weak as a baby!

Justin: I'm sorry, did I not mention that

you could steal an opponent's taunt? I stocked up a finisher, then hit the finisher button while moving the analog stick, stealing your taunt — and most of your momentum.

Now watch this! Randy is guarding Kaiser to make sure he doesn't interrupt us. In the meantime, because this is a Table match, I can set up the table in the corner, then Irish whip you into that same corner, so you stick to the table. Once you're set up, I grab you and I can slingshot you through the table. How cool is that?

Chris: NOOOO! Ouch. Clearly, the Great Slate needs to...

Randy: Cook more wrath?

Chris: HUUURRAUGH! [Tackles Randy and puts him in a Sharpshooter. Randy attempts to tap out, but the ref, played by Kaiser, isn't looking.]

Justin: Ah, yes. Once again, art imitates life. It's poetic, really.



This
month's
winner:
CHRIS

PSM FEBRUARY CHALLENGE

RULES You can only send an entry for one challenge. If you cheat or use codes, you'll be disqualified and bring shame upon your losses. The final contest entry will be accepted on March 1st. If there are multiple qualifying entries, the winner will be decided by the best paragraph that explains why you should be the winner. Send a photo or a videotape (non-returnable) proving you've met the challenge, and your short paragraph explaining why you're the winner. Sorry, no e-mail entries. This contest is open only to residents of the United States, age 18 years or older. PSM reserves the right to substitute prizes of equal or greater monetary value, if necessary.

SEND YOUR ENTRIES TO:

PSM January Challenge
(the challenge you're entering)
c/o Futura Network USA
4000 Shoreline Court, Ste. 400
South San Francisco, CA 94080

Challenge #1: Ape Escape Academy

Get all of the monkey statues.

Challenge #2: Devil May Cry 3: Special Edition

Beat the game with Vergil, and get S ranks (or higher) on all levels on any difficulty.

Challenge #3: WWE SmackDown Vs. RAW (PSP)

Make Randy in the Create-a-Superstar mode and give him the World Title.

NOVEMBER WINNERS

Nightmare Before Christmas
Andrew Reese, Los Angeles, CA

Urban Reign

Jonathan Wong, San Jose, CA

Capcom Classics Collection

Stan Miller, Minneapolis, MN

This month's winners will receive:

Trapt

Beat Down: Fists of Vengeance
WWE SmackDown! Vs. RAW 2006

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GAMEFLY

GF

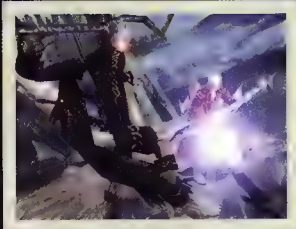
PlayStation 2 XBOX GAMEFLY GAME BOT ADVANCE NINTENDO DS PSP XBOX 360

Expires 3/1/06

Caption Contest

Make us laugh, win a prize!

Think you're funny? Then write down a caption for this screen, and e-mail it to us at psm@futurenetworkusa.com, with the subject line "107 Caption Contest!" Or, simply send it to us through the SuperPlay section of our website at psmonline.com. The deadline is March 1st. If we choose your caption as the funniest, it'll net you a PSM Prize Package. Include your full name and mailing address, or your loot gets sent to The Spoiler.



Caption Contest Winners



"When the pinata growled, it was clear this would not be a 'happy' birthday."

"Stop! Nobody move... I dropped my human!"



November Issue Winner:
John Diamond,
Dryden, NY

December Issue Winner:
Jesse Ossenkopp,
Bronx, NY

CHEATER, CHEATER!

Gretzky NHL '06 (PSP)

From the Main Menu, select Features, then Challenges, then Unlockables.

On the Unlockables page, enter $\uparrow \downarrow \leftarrow \rightarrow \text{O} \text{O}$ to bring up the virtual keyboard, then use the keyboard to enter the codes.

Unlock 1979 Oilers home jersey
raetdhs fo pschma
Unlock 1999 Rangers away jersey
sooh
Unlock 1994 Kings home jersey
knqi aywen
Unlock 1990 Jets home jersey
mliedd fo cnaada
Unlock Page 44 Team (hidden
development team) eht rctihacte
Unlock Team SCEA (hidden develop-
ment team) oyns nusle
Wayne Gretzky circa 1987 becomes
playable skater (sign him to your
team using the Pro Manager)
logry zeda
Wayne Gretzky circa 1994
becomes playable skater (sign
him to your team using the Pro
Manager) etsw tcaos ywnwa

L.A. Rush

Add \$5000
 $\uparrow \downarrow \leftarrow \rightarrow \text{O} \text{O} \text{O} \uparrow$
All traffic drives at 255mph
 $\uparrow \downarrow \leftarrow \rightarrow \text{O} \text{O} \leftarrow$
Disable cops
 $\uparrow \downarrow \leftarrow \rightarrow \text{O} \text{O} \rightarrow \text{O} \leftarrow$
First place (in street races) or suc-
cess (in acquies or retrubitions)
 $\uparrow \downarrow \leftarrow \rightarrow \text{O} \leftarrow \text{O} \uparrow$
Infinite nitros
 $\uparrow \downarrow \leftarrow \rightarrow \text{O} \uparrow \downarrow \text{O} \uparrow$
No catch-up on any races

Set profile name to C-VHARD
Unlock all
 $\uparrow \downarrow \leftarrow \rightarrow \text{O} \uparrow \text{O} \downarrow \text{O} \leftarrow \text{O} \rightarrow$

Mortal Kombat: Shaolin Monks

All codes are entered at the main menu.

Unlock *Mortal Kombat II*
While holding O , enter
 $\text{O} \uparrow \downarrow \leftarrow \rightarrow \text{O} \text{O}$
Unlock Scorpion
While holding O , enter
 $\text{O} \uparrow \text{O} \text{O} \leftarrow \rightarrow \text{O}$
Unlock Sub-Zero
While holding O , enter
 $\text{O} \uparrow \downarrow \leftarrow \text{O} \text{O} \uparrow \text{O}$

Star Wars Battlefront II

While playing any single-player game, pause, then enter the code.

Become invincible
 $\uparrow \uparrow \uparrow \downarrow \downarrow \downarrow \leftarrow \uparrow \uparrow \uparrow \leftarrow \rightarrow$
Get Unlimited Ammo
 $\uparrow \downarrow \leftarrow \downarrow \downarrow \downarrow \downarrow \leftarrow \downarrow \downarrow \downarrow \leftarrow \rightarrow$

Tak: The Great Juju Challenge

Unlock Tak Turn 1
3 Fruits, 18 Crystals, 6 Bugs
Unlock Vehicle Art
44 Fruits, 55 Crystals, 11 Bugs
Unlock World Art
34 Fruits, 49 Crystals, 83 Bugs

Total Overdose

Press $\text{O} \uparrow + \text{O} \uparrow \text{R3} + \text{O} \uparrow + \text{O} \uparrow + \text{L3}$

before entering the codes.

Get 9 Rewinds $\text{O} \text{O} \text{O} \text{O} \text{O}$
Get all Loco Moves $\text{O} \text{O} \text{O} \text{O}$
Get all weapons $\text{O} \text{O} \text{O} \text{O}$
Refill health $\text{X} \text{O} \text{O} \text{O}$

True Crime: New York City

Pause the game, go to the map screen, and hold $\text{O} \uparrow \text{O}$, then enter the code.

Unlock Redman game
 $\text{X} \text{O} \text{O} \text{O} \text{O} \text{O}$
Unlock new outfit in Puma store
 $\text{X} \text{O} \text{O} \text{O}$
Get \$999,999
 $\text{O} \text{O} \text{O} \text{O} \text{O} \text{O}$
Max. crime rate in all precincts
 $\text{X} \text{O} \text{O} \text{O} \text{O} \text{O}$
Get unlimited ammo
 $\text{O} \text{O} \text{O} \text{O} \text{O} \text{O}$
Get unlimited endurance
 $\text{O} \text{O} \text{O} \text{O} \text{O} \text{O}$
Ultra Easy mode
 $\text{O} \text{O} \text{O} \text{O} \text{O}$
Reset Rogue Meter to 0 when flashing badge or firing a warning shot $\text{X} \text{O} \text{O} \text{O} \text{O} \text{O}$
Run around with severed limbs
 $\text{O} \text{O} \text{O} \text{O} \text{O} \text{O}$
Deal double damage
 $\text{X} \text{O} \text{O} \text{O} \text{O} \text{O}$

X-Men Legends 2

Team Bonuses:

Age of Apocalypse (any four heroes with AoA skins)
+100% Attack Rating
Agile Warriors (Deadpool, Nightcrawler, Sunfire, Toad)
+5% XP
Bruiser Brigade (Colossus,

Juggernaut, Rogue, Wolverine)
20 Energy gained per Kill
Brotherhood of Evil (Juggernaut, Magneto, Scarlet Witch, Toad)
+5% XP

Dark Past (Deadpool, Gambit, Rogue, Wolverine) 5% Vampire/Leech Health
Double Date (Cyclops, Jean Grey, Gambit, Rogue)
20 Health gained per Kill
Energy Corps (Bishop, Cyclops, Gambit, Ironman) +5% Damage Given
Family Affair (Juggernaut, Professor X, Magneto, Scarlet Witch) +5 Health Regen
Femme Fatale (Jean Grey, Rogue, Scarlet Witch, Storm)
5% Vampire/Leech Health
Forces of Nature (Iceman, Magneto, Storm, Sunfire)
+10 to all Resistances
Heavy Metal (Colossus, Ironman, Juggernaut, Magneto)
+10 to all stats
New Avengers (Bishop, Ironman, Scarlet Witch, Wolverine)
+15% Max Health
New X-Men (Bishop, Colossus, Nightcrawler, Storm, Sunfire, Wolverine) +15% Max Health

Old School (Cyclops, Iceman, Jean Grey, Magneto, Professor X, Toad) +15% Max Energy
Raven Knights (Deadpool, Iceman, Ironman, Professor X)
+15% Techbit drops
Special Ops (Bishop, Deadpool, Gambit, Nightcrawler)
+5% Damage Given

Enter while playing:

God Mode
 $\downarrow \downarrow \downarrow \uparrow \uparrow \downarrow \downarrow \leftarrow \rightarrow$

Touch of Death
 ←←→→→→↑
Super Speed
 ↑↑↑↑↓↓
 Keep xtrme tokens full
 ←↓→↓→↓↑↓↑↓

Enter in the Danger Room menu:
 Unlock all Danger Room courses
 →→←←↑↓↑↓

Enter in the Review menu:
 Unlock all comics
 →←→←↑↑↓
 Unlock all concept art
 ←←→←↑↓↑↓
 Unlock all load screens:
 →←→←↑↓↑↓
 Unlocks all cinematics:
 ←→→←↓↓←↓

Enter at the Shop menu:
 Get 100,000 tech bits
 ↑↑↑↓→↓

Enter in the Team menu:
 Set all heroes to level 99
 ↑↑↓↓←←→→
 Unlock all available alternate skins
 ↓↑←→←↑↑
 Unlock all heroes
 →←←→↑↑↑
 Unlocks all hero powers for heroes on the team
 ←→→↓↑↑

Zatch Bell

Enter at the title screen:

Unlock Zeno
 ↑↑↓↓←←→→⊗
 Unlock the Zeno Story
 ↑↑↓↓←←→→⊗

Ghost in the Shell PSP

Defeat the Jameson in the following stages to unlock these weapons:

Sub Mission 2-1	Pulse Cannon
Sub Mission 2-2	GAM gun
Sub Mission 2-3	Stun Stick
Event Mission 2	Pile Bunker
Sub Mission 3-1	Catal
Sub Mission 3-2	Moose gun
Sub Mission 3-3	Sprinkler

Event Mission 3	Physical Shield
-----------------	-----------------

Sub Mission 4-1	Anti-missile missile
Sub Mission 4-2	Ricochet Needle
Sub Mission 4-3	Optic Shield

Event Mission 4	Floating mine
-----------------	---------------

Sub Mission 5-1	Discharger
Sub Mission 5-2	Stun Grenade Launcher
Sub Mission 5-3	Pile Grenade

Event Mission 5	Wave motion gun
Sub Mission 6-1	Rail gun
Sub Mission 6-2	Earthquake

Event Mission 6	Wave motion gun
-----------------	-----------------

Aeon Flux

Enter the codes at the Cheat menu:

Become invulnerable
 TANGO ROMEO INDIA ROMEO
 OSCAR XRAY
 Get unlimited health
 CHARLIE LIMA OSCAR
 NOVEMBER ECHO
 Get unlimited ammo
 FOXTROT UNIFORM GOLF
 Refill health
 HOTEL ECHO ALPHA LIMA
 MIKE ECHO
 One-hit kills
 BRAVO UNIFORM CHARLIE
 KILO FOXTROT SIERRA TANGO
 Get unlimited power strike combos
 LIMA CHARLIE VICTOR GOLF
 Get all slideshows
 PAPA INDIA XRAY ECHO
 SIERRA

The Chronicles of Narnia: The Lion, The Witch, and The Wardrobe

Enter these codes while playing:

Refill health
 Hold □, then press ↓←←→
 Become invincible
 Hold □, then press ↓↑↓→
 Get 10,000 coins
 Hold □, then press ↓←→↓
 Skip the level
 Hold □, then press ↓←→↓→↑
 Unlock levels
 Hold □, then press ↑↑→→↑↓

Need for Speed Most Wanted

Enter these codes at the Start screen:

Get Gestalt SYNTEC Ford GT
 ←←→←↑↓↑
 Open Burger King Challenge
 ↑↑↓↓←←→→
 Get an extra marker
 ↑↑↓↓←←→→

Peter Jackson's King Kong

King Kong Cheat Menu

To open the Cheat menu, hold □+□ at the main menu, then press ↓□↑□↓↑↑↑. Then release the shoulder buttons. Enter the following codes in the Cheat menu:

Become invulnerable
 8wonder
 Get lots of ammo
 KK 999 mun
 Unlock all levels
 KKSt0ry
 Get one-hit kills
 GrosBras
 Get revolver
 KKligun
 Get machine gun
 KKcapone
 Get sniper rifle
 KKSn1per

Prince of Persia: The Two Thrones

Enter the codes at the pause screen:

Get Chainsaw
 ↑↑↓↓←←→→⊗⊗⊗
 Get Toy Hammer
 ←←→→⊗⊗⊗⊗↑
 Get Telephone
 →←→←↓↑↑↑⊗⊗⊗⊗
 Get Swordfish
 ↑↑↓↓←←→→⊗⊗⊗

SSX On Tour

Enter in the Cheats menu:

Get unlimited boost
 ZOOMJUICE
 Get all levels
 BACKSTAGEPASS
 Unlock characters
 ROADIEROUNDUP
 Get all clothing
 FLYTHREADS
 Get all movies
 THEBIGPICTURE
 Get extra cash
 LOOTSNOOT
 Improve your stats
 POWERPLAY

Tony Hawk's American Wasteland

Enter these codes in the Cheats menu:

Perfect grinds
 grindXpert
 Perfect manuals
 2wheels!
 Perfect skitches

hitcharide
 Unlock Jason Ellis
 sirius-DJ
 Unlock Mat Hoffman
 the_condor

The Warriors

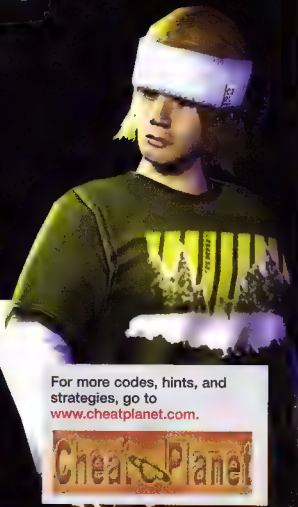
Enter these codes while playing:

Get infinite health
 ↑△L3
 Get unlimited sprint
 ↓□←⊗
 Get unlimited rage
 ⊗⊗⊗⊗
 Finish the current level
 ↓⊗⊗⊗←
 Get a bat
 ⊗⊗↓
 Get an unbreakable bat
 L3L3↑
 Get brass knuckles
 ⊗⊗⊗⊗
 Get a pipe
 ⊗⊗↑
 Get a knife
 ↓↓↑↑L3
 Get a machete
 ⊗⊗⊗⊗
 Get steel-toed boots
 R3⊗L3⊗

Battlefield 2: Modern Combat

Enter in the code while playing:

Get all weapons
 Hold □+□, then press
 →↓↑←



For more codes, hints, and strategies, go to www.cheatplanet.com.



SUPER-PLAY

WARNING: READ AT YOUR OWN RISK!

GOD OF WAR WAS SUCH A GREAT GAME! I ESPECIALLY LIKED THE ENDING...

...WHEN KRATOS BECOMES THE NEW GOD OF WAR!

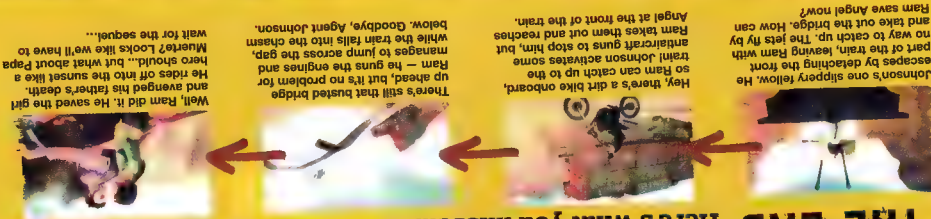
HA! THE SPOILER STRIKES AGAIN!



THE SPOILER PAGE

Hello PSM readers, and welcome to The Spoiler page! I am your host, The Spoiler, a man who does not know the meaning of the word "tonetic"... nor the definitions of the words "secret" or "taboo." Here,

game stories will be revealed with nothing withheld: who lives, who dies, how it ends... anything at all. So **BE WARNED!** If you read this page, you may learn something you didn't want to know...



Well, Ram did it. He saved the girl and avenged the laborer's death. He dies off like about Papa Muerter? Looks like what we'll have to see should... but what about Papa Muerter? Looks like what we'll have to see should...

There's still that busted bridge Ram — he runs the engines and manages to jump across the gap, while the train falls into the chasm below. Goodbye, Agent Johnson.

Hey, there's a dirt bike on board, so Ram can catch up to the anti-aircraft guns to stop him, but Ram takes them out and reaches Angel at the front of the train.

Johnson's one slippery fellow. He escapes by detaching the front part of the train, leaving Ram with no way to catch up. The best by far Ram save Angel now!

THE END
Face it: not all of us finish every game we play.
Here's what you missed.



his gunslinger's tale starts with a bang — Ernesto Cruz is on a DEA-sanctioned mission to get some intel on a big-time drug kingpin. After shooting his way through an army of enemy soldiers, Ernesto manages to make it to safety. A plane loaded with some DEA agents. But the agents double-cross him and toss him out of the plane. Ernesto's DEA agent son, Tommy, goes undercover in Mexico to find his father's killer. Unfortunately, things don't go so well, and Tommy gets injured in the line of duty. Luckily for him, he has a twin brother, Ramiro (he goes by "Ram"), who's not actually a DEA agent — he's pretty much the bad boy of the family.
So now it's Ram who goes undercover and tries to buddy up with the local drug cartels so he can find more info on Papa Muerter. After doing a few odd jobs, Ram starts working for the drug lord Cesar Morales. Tommy and the DEA send in a team to follow Ram to a meat factory where Morales stores his cocaine, but Morales had set up a trap to kill the DEA agents! Ram nar-

TOTAL OVERDOSE: A GUNSLINGER'S TALE IN MEXICO
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PULSE

Answers from the Future
 Save a magazine 3 or 4 months in the past!

Fandom
 Send us your fan art, cosplay or fan fiction photos - anything that shows how crazy you are about PlayStation!

Answer November's Fandom poll too!

General Letters
 Write about anything you want, as long as it's related to PlayStation's quality of life.

Pitch the Pros
 Give us a good idea for a game, issue or feature and maybe we'll see what that game editor thinks of it!

Rants & Raves
 Tell us how much you love or hate a game or feature and we'll see what our readers think!

Sound Bytes Poll

If you've got an HDD in your PS2, did you get it just for Final Fantasy XI, or because you were excited about future games / programs that would make use of it?

Got it just for FFXI

Got it with future games in mind

Submit Vote

View Results

SPARKLE!

MAKE YOUR VOICE HEARD!

CHAT WITH PSM WRITERS AND READERS

Join with gamers nationwide to discuss PlayStation (and pretty much everything else), and talk directly with the editors of PSM! (Help 'em out folks, they don't have many friends.)



PSMChrisSlate



PSMRandyNelson



PSMBillDonohue



PSMEricBratcher



PSMKaiserHwang

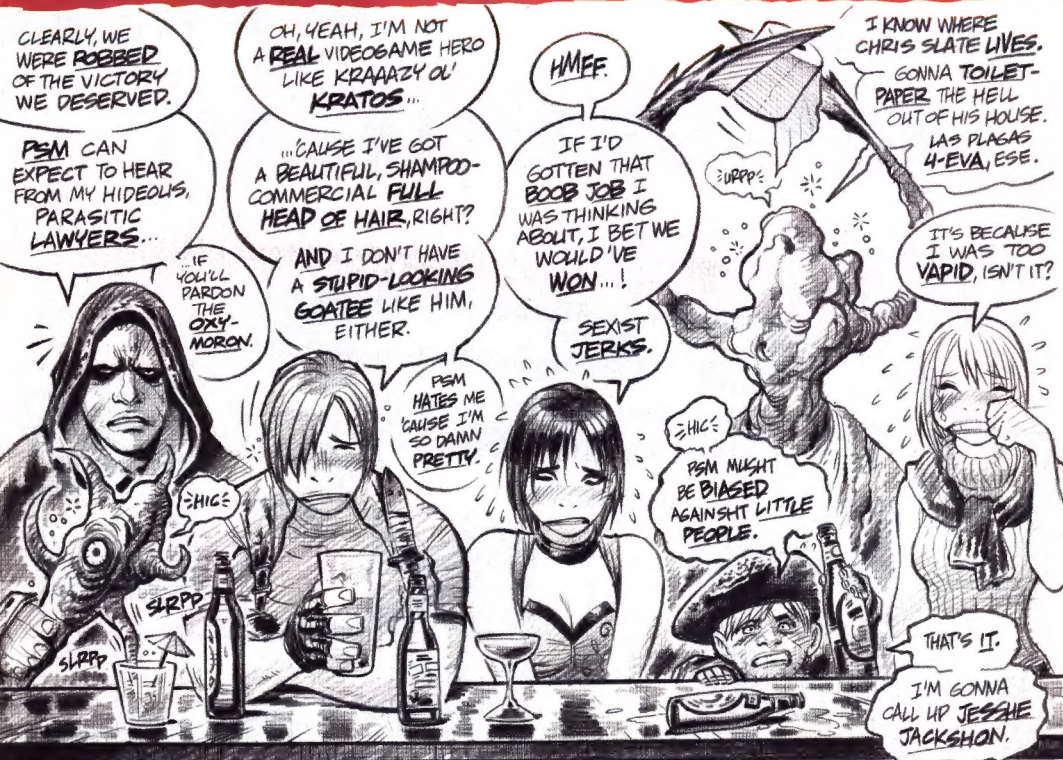
LOOK FOR US ONLINE!



So Close...

For every Game of the Year, a runner-up gets its heart broken.

by ADAM WARREN



NEXT ISSUE

Spring has sprung, and next issue we'll bring you an in-depth look at the bounty of hot new games that were saved until after the holidays! Think you're in for a post-X-mas slump? Yeah, right! PSM will also go hands-on with the latest installment in one of PlayStation's biggest series. It's one that's seen some hard times, but things are literally turning around... and we'll tell you exactly how. And no, it's **not** *Tomb Raider*. Find out in 30!

SEE YOU IN JUST 30 DAYS!



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SAMURAI WARRIORS

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FEBRUARY 22

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Thank you!